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Hoster \$2.75  
Dusty Godmother.

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THE DUSTY GODMOTHER

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to Mary G. Foster, my mother.



*There was a little girl in a shabby coat* who used to meet her father secretly on a bench in a city park. The trees were sooty from winter, but every Friday afternoon, because Friday was his day off, she would go there on her way home from school and wait for him. The bench was at a turn of the walk, where an iron fence ran along the top of a bluff : away below in the watery sunshine you could see a loop of river, shining dully, with massed buildings and chimneys indistinct in smoke and haze through the deceptive light. Sometimes he would be late. He had a lot of other things to do, with his downtown friends, with other men, on his day off.

Patiently, with folded hands, she waited, her scuffed shoes not quite able to touch the ground though she sat on the edge of the bench. She didn't mind the waiting, much. It gave her time to think of him before he came.

Every day during the week she would have read his by-line stories in the morning paper, at unobtrusive times when no one was noticing what she was doing. Sometimes she had to go out to the trash-can in the back yard when she got home from school to find that morning's paper. But there was usually a story in it *By James N. Kerry*. It might be a murder, or a funny story harder to understand, or a trial, it might be almost anything, and once in a while it would lead off with the name of another town and the date ; then she would know that he was gone for a trip,

on an out-of-town assignment. Leaning against the trash-can she would read, and as she read she would see him strolling into a courtroom or into a place where a bunch of cops stood around somebody who had been killed. She had watched him talking with other men and she knew how he looked then. But she, she knew him when he was sad, and his eyes were gentle. That little park was an empty place, in the middle of a city. The buds were beginning to come out on the bare thickets, but as she sat there a cold west wind was blowing last November's leaves about her feet. Waiting, she had time to think of him, with love, with care, before he came.

## T W O

*There was a restaurant where the people of* the night of the city came for coffee after throwing back their rumpled sheets when the gray of another afternoon came into their rooms. This restaurant was long and narrow, with old red velvet curtains to the booths. The bar was in the back, and it was softly lighted. At one side a pink neon arrow pointed toward a sloping passage to the annexes which on different levels of different years had eaten their way back into the mouldy brick buildings. And over the buffet behind the lunch-counter burned a line of amber light globes. You could see sunlight in the street outside, too, but here it was dark with all the nights of all the

people who came here. Kerry pushed aside his empty dishes and the afternoon papers and lit a cigarette.

The waiter had twitched the curtains of his booth only partly closed. At the end of the lunch-counter near the bar a police lieutenant was sitting, using a nail-file. He would use it slowly and carefully for awhile and then he would hold his big mitt up and look at it. Kerry had known him for years. He handled the collections for the midtown district. He had been sitting there eating a steak when Kerry came in, and though Kerry had stood at the bar for a few minutes, within six feet of him, he had not turned his head. Kerry knew why, and they both knew that it probably wouldn't amount to anything. In a month if they happened to be standing at a bar at the same time they would probably be buying each the other a drink again.

Under the afternoon papers on Kerry's table was a book. He had picked it out last night from a stack on the literary editor's desk and put it in his overcoat pocket. He opened it now, a page at random in the middle. Two shaded light globes hung on the brown wall at the end of his table. They cast unmatching circles of light on the page. The chaste, leaded-out type was restful to his eyes. He didn't know much about fine prose, but it was nice to know that there were men who could so live that they were able to write like that. Tonight in his room he would read it.

The police lieutenant had taken out a silver-mounted pocket comb, and was combing his thinning blond hair. Some of the other booths had customers in them and the waiter came along, swishing a napkin and looking at the tables from the corners of his lowered eyes. He had a broken, heavy face. He stopped and

wrote Kerry's check from the pad he kept stuck under the waistband of his apron. Laying it on a saucer, he walked on. In the back of the place some people were talking in the droning, earnest voices of people sitting at a bar through the afternoon. There were three men and a woman. Two of the men and the woman were doing the talking, hunched over in intimate attitudes, their heads together over their glasses. The other man, at a distance from them, was drinking silently, with a light pearl-gray hat pulled down over his eyes. He hadn't moved, except to drink, since Kerry had been there.

Slowly, the police lieutenant got down from his chair, and reached for his gold-braided cap. He put it on firmly, giving the visor a final slanting pull. Flexing his shoulders back and forth inside his uniform, he pulled down his coat at the sides and smoothed his hands down his front. Then he nodded to Kerry with lordly condescension, an unlit cigar tilted up in his face. But he showed an uneasy flash of too much whites to his eyes as he turned away to go out.

Kerry was thinking that this was the time of year when people who lived in houses heard the voices of children again swift and light across all the back yards in the first shadows of spring. He was just finishing his cigarette when a phone rang.

He could hear the cashier answering it in her little glass cage at the front end of the lunch-counter, near the door. She talked briefly and then with split, shrill intensity called:

"Mr. Kerry?"

The waiter must have been standing just out of sight, because with one gloomy step he appeared between the curtains of the booth and said heavily:



"Mr. Kerry."

Kerry shook his head, making a downward, silencing motion with one hand. The waiter turned to the front of the restaurant and shouted:

"Not here."

The cashier talked in monosyllables, listened awhile, said primly, "All right," and then yelled:

"If Mr. Kerry comes in he's to call his office immediately! It was an operator on the switchboard over at the Tribune. She says they've been trying to locate Mr. Kerry all over town. Mr. Brunn wants him. The operator says it's very, very important for Mr. Kerry to contact Mr. Brunn immediately."

Kerry started to say "Thanks," but it was too soon.

"You're supposed to call your office right away," the waiter said laboriously. "It was an operator on the switchboard over at the Tribune. She says they've been trying to locate you all over town. A Mr. Brunn wants to see you. The operator says it's very, very important for you to contact this Mr. Brunn right away."

"Thanks," Kerry said. He knew about it. The office had called his hotel four times before he left. The telephone girl at the hotel had told him. He had a little arrangement with her, covering his days off.

He paid his check with a five and, when the waiter came back, left a dollar on the saucer. Brunn's getting dynamic cost dough, but he would double it back on his expense account. He slid out of the booth and straightened his new yellow necktie, looking at the dark mirror back of the lunch-counter. His shirt and his suit were brown. He admired the effect.

On his way out he said to the cashier : "Thanks, Gertrude."

"Oh, not at all, Mr. Kerry," she said.

On the curb, trying to pick an empty taxi out of the traffic, among all the noises and the passing voices in the shadow of the buildings he became conscious of a strange lack. And after a minute he realized.

There was nothing young in the whole street. None of the voices—even a cat which came picking its way across the sidewalk among the hurrying legs, this cat was elderly and filled with sin. None of the faces—nothing, nothing had the remembrance of wonder.

### T H R E E

*When the little girl saw a taxi turn into the park she heard the spring's first robin singing on a budding twig. Maybe he had been there for quite awhile, but she had not heard him, not really, until now. She considered this an omen. It was well to make the most of what magics came along. Slipping off the bench, she walked to the curb and stood there quietly while the taxi pulled up beside her and her father climbed out, with his overcoat blowing about his legs as he handed the driver a green slip of paper. She knew all about that : when you were hustled out on an assignment the city desk gave you two taxi slips. One to go out on, and one to come back ; but you kept*

the taxi and made the round trip on one slip, keeping the other to use for yourself. Every good reporter usually had a vest pocket full of them, along with some movie passes. She looked at him with pride, remembering the time when they were all together in the very second-hand house on the hill, and he could take her to the movies on his day off. He would just hand a couple of passes carelessly to the doorman while she walked in with dignity. Free. The other little girls at school looked upon her with deep respect when she mentioned this. And she and her father would sit together in the warm and moving darkness, dreamily chewing caramels out of a paper bag in his pocket, while the wonders unfolded, and—

But all regrets flew out of her little beating heart, for her father was turning to her, there beside the taxi, holding out both hands, and they were together again. He was the same as ever—the broken lifted eyebrow, the old brown hat that always looked as if somebody had made a drop-kick with it, and his voice:

“Good afternoon, Miss Kerry.”

“Hello, Jim,” she said.

He carried with him a faint but friendly smell of whisky and tobacco and barbershop. They sat on their bench, with her head leaned back against the crook of his elbow. She said in the offhand way of newspaper people:

“That was a good story on the Society Blackmailer Exposed. Tuesday.”

“. . . I had a run-in with the d.a. on that one,” Jim said.

“And the Police Graft Ring Hinted. I guess you’ve had a pretty busy week,” she said.

“About medium. How’ve things been going at school?”

"Oh, about the same," she said. After a while she added casually: "I got two one-hundreds in spelling this week. On Monday and on Wednesday."

"Well, that's fine," he said.

Looking away from him, she muttered honestly:

"The other days weren't so good."

"Don't let it worry you," he said. "I had the same trouble with the capitals of the states. I'm still in some doubt about South Dakota."

"Pierre," she said.

He took a sheaf of folded copy-paper from his overcoat pocket and with a pencil from his vest pocket he wrote it down. "Thanks," he said.

They were silent for a time, looking at the river shining in the slanting sunlight far below. Finally, she asked:

"Jim, what's blackmail?"

He looked down at her suddenly, though laughing a little with his eyes.

"A bad business," he said. "You oughtn't to read that junk."

"They're your stories," she said. "I read them to kind of keep in touch with you, all week."

He turned his head away and seemed to be examining the fingernails of his free hand.

"Oh, well," he said. ". . . But don't you like our stories better?"

"Yes," she said, making herself a little more comfortable in the crook of his arm. "Jim, tell me once upon a time."

She used that childish phrase because she knew he liked it,

because a long, long time ago, when she was only about seven—at least two years ago, before the divorce, when they were all together—she had used to say it to him when he came in to tell her goodnight, and he had liked it. It had become a saying between them. And she kept it because . . . somehow it was like old times to her, too.

“All right, honey,” he said. “Here we go. But first, here’s something.”

He pulled a paper bag out of his other overcoat pocket, and put it on her lap. It had lemondrops in it. Candy was about the only thing he could bring her; it wouldn’t be safe for him to give her anything to carry home. They would be discovered.

She put three lemondrops into her mouth at once, and closed her eyes.

“Once upon a time,” Jim said slowly, “there was a little girl who lived in the secret places of an ancient wilderness, old as the world itself, a forest that was dark with magic. She was a great hand for reading, this little girl, but she shouldn’t ever have wasted her time with things that were written for dull people in crowds, because she was acquainted with better things. Do you remember when you used to help me bring in the logs for the fireplace, and the bark would fall off one of them? The round bare wood, when you looked at it, would be all covered with mysterious brown scrawling lines. The work of the summertime, of something that wasn’t there any more. It was like a message something had left there.”

“Yes, like writing,” she said.

“Ah, so you know . . . Well, this little girl I’m speaking of—it was a small house she lived in, very small and not proud,

there in the ancient woods that will never be cut down. But this little house of hers was magic, too, for none but believing eyes could see it.

"An invisible house is very pleasant to live in. You can be mostly undisturbed, and it keeps the sooty rain of the world where it belongs. And so she lived there, this little girl, and she was so well-thought-of that the birds would bow as she passed—like that robin, there, on the grass. You may think he's pulling worms, but he's not. He is bowing.

"He's only using a worm to brace himself.—Now, not far from her house, in the middle of this dark wood, was a golden tree of great enchantment. With a spring that came bubbling up between two of its roots. She would go and sit there with her spelling-book, which was rarely opened, and every time she had a shining thought a golden leaf would fall into the spring and go whirling away out of sight. This brook would carry them out of the magic wood into the world, which was mostly gray, and sometimes people who had to live there because they didn't know where else to go, would see one of them go shining by. They might even pick it up, and look at it. But it would fade and crumble when they tried to figure it out, and leave them with empty hands. I think that maybe this whole story is going to be about the golden tree, and its leaves which fell and forever budded as a little girl sat with her spelling-book unopened. . . ."

It was a long story, and with her cheek, knobby with lemondrops, against his coat, she could hear his voice going on and on deep and quiet in his chest. And so, on their windy bench, they went away into the brighter, the more dependable world they had made in their hearts; the secret world where they could

always be together. And the robin flew up from the gritty grass of the park, back to his bare twig, and sang above their heads.

#### FOUR

*It was a long story and the sun had set by* the time Jim flipped his final cigarette away. Darkness was coming on, and the wind was talking.

They walked, close together, across the narrow park in the dusk. A scurry of leaves went skating down the walk ahead of them, and in a sudden blown dispersal vanished into the coming night.

They came out blinking vaguely to the city glare on a curb, and crossing the avenue she held his hand; for a minute they stood still in the middle of the pavement while lights and weights poured by in smells of gasoline.

He walked with her a part of the way along the sidewalks. At the next corner but one from her street he stopped. He had to leave her there. They must not be seen together. He took off his hat and bending down said, "Well, so long, honey."

"Good-bye, Jim," she said steadily.

Her face could touch his shirtfront. Long enough to hear him swallow, and say under his breath:

"Aw, Julie—"

And then he was gone. Walking away, with his hands in his

pockets, whistling. She trudged on toward home. Her eyes were dim for him; but she walked on back toward her weekday life. To her own personal terror which awaited her there, and which she had never told Jim about—her bleak and quiet terror that they were going to send her away to a boarding school; not to see Jim any more.

She was afraid of the strange school—it would be repulsive and crowded and lonely, living among peering strangers—but she could have stood all that. She could stand anything, for herself.

So she came to the solid, the substantial Georgian brick house where she lived now, and cautiously opened the big, fresh-painted green front door with its polished brass knocker. Carelessly, as if she had just come romping in from play, she tossed her little hat on the table in the pale-carpeted hall and peered into the living room. Her mother, in a moonlight satin house-gown, was sitting there; leaning back a little, gracefully, in a wing chair, with long and trailing fingertips resting upon a pile of magazines on a low table beside her. Her face was very beautiful in the firelight.

Mr. Gilson was there, too, the man her mother had married. He was standing before the fire, talking to her mother in his smooth, cultured voice; and the fireplace had beautiful winking brass andirons: she found it difficult to look into Mr. Gilson's face.

Slowly, she went into the living room, one foot stepping carefully before another. Feeling hot and dusty and tousled as always when she came into this room—but suddenly, with defiance, she felt like what she was, a newspaper person, and if they



didn't like it they could . . . Well, anyway, with her eyes demurely lowered, she received her mother's kiss, and heard her drawl:

"Such a hot and busy little girl. Run up, now, and scrub for dinner. You'll have to hurry, it's nearly time."

Mr. Gilson looked down at her coolly, politely, with his pale, well-bred, lawyer's face, with his scrupulous courtesy which had never flawed yet.

"Hello," she said.

He inclined his head. "My dear."

She knew it was Mr. Gilson who wanted her sent away to a school in the east, and she knew why. He did not like to be reminded in his own house of another time and another man.

And she knew that if her mother ever found out that she was seeing Jim, she too would want her to be sent away, out of Jim's reach. And then she really would be sent away.

She went slowly up the staircase to her room.

Her room was beautiful, and lonely.

## FIVE

*Turning among the jostling sidewalk crowds* to watch a small figure walking up the avenue, away from him, Jim fumbled in his pocket for a cigarette and matches. He stood holding them absent-mindedly in his hands until he saw her turn

the farther corner under a streetlight and go out of sight.

The whistle dead upon his lips, he went into the bar in front of which he had stopped. It was filled with glitter and people and their six o'clock noises which struck you like a gust at the red-lacquered door.

He sat on a high red-leather stool between two women. "Rye," he said. One of the women looked poor and companionable, with the tired neatness of a department store girl on her way home. The other one was dark and perfect with beauty-shoppe hauteur in an extremely expensive fur coat, somebody's wife on the way home. When she moved slightly and glanced at him, her eyes had the character of the shining points of crystal and mirror along the back bar. The people at the tables were making so much noise that the bartender leaned closer over the damp mahogany. "Rye, you said?" Jim nodded.

After awhile, he went to the phone booth and getting out a letter, looked up the name in the book. He wrote the number down on the back of the envelope and then dialled it. He was half-surprised when she answered: Anne Vollard was a nice-looking girl, a friend of Crosse's wife, and one would have supposed she had a date on Friday night. Her voice was curiously soft, but remote; somehow rather sweet, and unlike other women's voices he knew. He hadn't remembered that.

"This is Jim Kerry," he said. "I just got your invitation, and it's awfully nice of you, but look, I don't get through work till ten o'clock tomorrow night."

"Oh," she said. Her voice was still cool, that odd quality, but for some reason or other it suddenly sounded a little shy.

"Well, c-can't you come afterward? I mean, for a whisky and soda or something? Everyone will still be here.—That is, unless you have another—"

"No. I'd like to come," he said. "Ten thirty?"

"Oh, yes," she said.

He said all right, good-bye, but just as he was about to hang up the receiver he heard her hurrying to say something else: "—save your dinner for you, in the oven?"

"Oh, no, thanks," he said. "I eat downtown around seven."

"Well, good-bye," she said.

"Good-bye. And thanks."

"Oh, not at all," she said. "Good-bye."

He waited a minute, and then dropped another nickel in and called the city desk. Brunn answered, in a hurry to go home. The day side was going off.

"Kerry," Jim said.

"Who? Oh, hello, Jim. Where've you been?"

"—day off. You wanted me?"

"Oh, yes," Brunn said vaguely. "*Yeah*, we were—just a minute." He turned from the phone and Jim heard him talking to the night city editor. "You want Jim? He's on the phone, if you need him for anything." Then louder, he said: "It's all right, Jim. We've got it fixed up. We sent Richter."

"OK," Jim said.

Undecided, he stood outside the telephone booth a minute. He would have dinner at Rippler's, a thick steak amid that sporting elegance, with a magazine to read while he ate. But first, he would go back to his room to bathe and dress, slowly, en-

joying it. He would have a tall cool drink in the hot tub, and take a long time. It was something he couldn't do when he was married.

## SIX

*From the time he showed up for work next* afternoon Jim sensed a slack day. He leaned against the city desk where Brunn and Eddie the day city editor sat facing each other day after day through the years. And yet he knew that outside the office they were almost strangers. Brunn had a Brahmin-like coldness which he put on like his hat when he left the office. Eddie glanced up at Jim with his tired eyes in a face which always, even when he was old, would let people know what he had looked like when he was a little boy; he glanced up over the tops of his glasses and began sorting out some loose papers on the city desk. Brunn did not see Jim. Five or six of the other general assignment reporters were in, but only two were writing anything. The others were sitting around smoking and talking.

There was no one at the news desk across the aisle except the makeup-man who in his canvas printer's apron sprawled reading the funny paper. Behind him, though, the early crew was at the copy desk. Two or three of them had got up to stretch and smoke, and Nick was in the slot, a big fellow with a cropped

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blond crew-cut who sat with his green eyeshade pushed back and his feet propped up beside a long-dried coffee mug. His piercing western drawl cut through all the confused noises: the copy-readers began laughing. Someone came through the composing-room door, letting in the clatter of the linotype machines, which hushed with a sigh as the door swung closed again.

"What have we got for Jim today?" Brunn said in an interested voice. Then Jim knew it was all right, that Brunn had really forgotten his vanishing-act. It was always a slight surprise, and slightly disturbing. He had worked for city editors who never forgot anything.

"Nothing yet," Eddie said. He handed Jim a batch of undertakers' blanks and community club notices. "Here you are, Houdini, until something warms up," he said demurely. Then Jim knew that Eddie had not forgotten.

Jim shoved the illiterate mess into his desk beside his typewriter and went to hang up his hat and overcoat. In his overcoat pocket was still the book he had swiped. He took it out and strolled across to toss it back on the literary editor's desk in a dark little office. He turned on the light and looked at some of the other books, but there was nothing in sight that he wanted to read.

He found himself reading less and less these last few years—he whose father, a damned good newspaperman, had made doubting fun of a boy who was always off in a corner with a library book. Lately, somehow, as he grew older, he was beginning to understand the old man. When he did read now, it was with a curious irritability—a sense of oh hell you can't write them anyway as seeingly as you want to, the things you see,

and to hell with the boys who try with wider margins. The nights of a morning newspaperman would sour God on attempts to chronicle His crossed-up but always hopeful children. It becomes after a while too deep for tears, too usual for comment, too much standardized in pattern to try to find new patterns for the telling. Everything human turns gray with work, with only a perpetual excited pretence of newness: gray as a newspaper page seen at a distance.

Jim stood at the files, looking over the afternoon papers. The other wall of the corridor, from floor to ceiling, was a series of wide arched windows looking out over the city. There was nothing in the papers, and he turned away. The clouds hung low over the city, heavy, absorbing the smoke, so that the towers lifting into the murk were clearer than the massed dark huddles of lower buildings from which they rose. At his feet was the Square with its split streams of traffic, crawling, clotting, breaking to flow again; and around the base of the statue, under the arm held forth in cast-iron civic blessing, a minute disorder of lives pouring from the curbs was for a moment stopped, a moment held in the immortality of pattern. But toward the horizons, the chimneys, the towers, a distant flat light of water, merged multiplied life into landscape more crowded, of infinite grays. The masses of living were invisible, out there; from these windows one could understand the necessity for statistics, orderly with dogged resolution, but from these windows also one could hear the dull perpetual roar of the unrest of a city, a modern city. Statistics set in columns of close type, but along the horizons heavy industry hung a tapestry of colored smoke against the sullen wall of distance. There was the dull roar, like

the sea. And like the sea the city lay, beneath its clouds, opaque in distance, but in detail terrible with the power of unrest—the power of being alive.

Jim walked slowly back into the city room; he was heavy with a leaden weight of a rebellion not even impatient any more but becoming sickly familiar, as a physical oppression of the heart can become familiar. It was time for him to leave, time to get out of the newspaper business. He had seen too much, he had worked too long: every story now was a rewrite of some other story he could remember, there was nothing new any more, only the bored weariness of getting different names correctly. The most appalling tragedy, the most grotesque mess complicated to madness by routine stupidity, the most nitwit statistics-draped revelation of politics—he wrote each one automatically, using the same old words, because somewhere, sometime, he had written it before. Only now, not the energy any more. He didn't want to wait around until he got his second wind of anxiety, like the older men slowing down, getting bald and heavy and tired, but always acting too alert, too anxiously dynamic. They were trapped with families. Now was the time for him to leave. The really smart boys got out in the early thirties. They used newspapers for springboards, some of them to astonishing successes. Men who hadn't been as good reporters as he was. Bankers, public relations viziers with white liners to their vests, advertising men, executives of all sorts, all with fine houses and easy hours. And most of them hadn't been natural, story-wise reporters, only shrewd—you could tell by letting them talk. The trouble was, he didn't know how to do anything else.

He sat down at his desk, propped his chair back against the

news desk behind him, and hauled out the handful of junk Ed-die had given him. It was a day when writing anything gave you a tired feeling in the middle of the chest and your fingers became flappy as seals' flippers, as weak as the feeling between your temples. He made his typewriter clatter loosely on an obituary. A routine obituary, worth the barest formula two inches: some guy who'd had a business, in this case a wholesale leather business, and probably had had his bad times and his good ones, and brought up a family. He typed out the names which the undertaker's young man had written in dampish pencil on the printed blank. Jerky with boredom, he finished it and then poked around with a couple of fingers the mess of smudgy papers that people had sent in for notices.

Sometimes in his room, toward morning when he couldn't sleep, he lay awake thinking how it would feel some night to die. Some windy night. He could feel the possibility of death in his body, for the first time, the subtle, and waiting possibility of dissolution in his breathing flesh. From his reporter's random knowledge of psychology, he connected it with his sadness over Julie. He wondered if anyone had ever traced the connection—the ancient and mortal connection, inevitable as the primitive cycles of insects—between consciousness of parenthood and consciousness of death. He was not given to mystical experiences, but the one, deepening, had awakened the other like a fainter echo.

He came to an item in the club notices which cheered him up. A group called The Tree Folk were going to meet at seven o'clock Sunday morning in Woodlawn Park for folk-dances, under the direction of Mr. Gwellyn Molge, and afterward they



were going to reassemble for a hunt breakfast at the home of a professor of English literature at the university. Jim tossed it back to Eddie.

"Might be a story in that. Done right," he said.

Eddie read it, and smiled wanly.

"Balls," he said.

"I'm not kidding. It could be a good freak," Jim said.

"Well, if you want to haul your bones out of bed at the crack of dawn, OK," Eddie said. "But no photographer. The photographers would all quit."

"I wasn't thinking of myself," Jim said. "I meant Lawrence." Lawrence was the sensitive-type reporter.

"I thought so," Eddie said. "For Christ's sake, Lawrence has got enough troubles already. If you don't look out, I'll assign you and Crosse both to it. Haw, haw, haw!"

Jim took the piece of paper back and began writing it dry, two or three lines.

"Besides," Eddie said, "most of them are university people, and they'd get sore unless we wrote it straight and it isn't worth a straight story."

Eddie knew all about every poopsie organization in town. He had the oddest little bits of knowledge. It was part of his job.

"They're sensitive as boils already," Eddie murmured. "After Crosse's stories on that Round Table Research Group getting subpoenaed by the professor's wife." Eddie stopped to grin dreamily. "The boss says butter up the university crowd for a while, because there's a big fracas coming. We're going to get the legislature steamed up about the politickers on the faculty

out there. We think this administration out there is lousy," Ed-die said virtuously.

"OK," Jim said.

In the middle of the afternoon Brunn got up from his side of the city desk and began walking up and down snapping his fingers and humming. After a while he stopped, leaning with his hand on Jim's shoulder.

"You all right, Jim?" he said.

"Sure. Why not?"

Jim looked up at him. Brunn was tall and looked western, though he wasn't, and he was wonderfully tailored as Jim remembered his visiting young uncles being when he was a child, when men were really tailored as somehow they weren't any more. Brunn was growing old and tired in a fast business where there was no room for mellowness. It was reflected in his haberdashery. He and Jim knew each other pretty well. They had long backgrounds which overlapped. For while Brunn had been a good newspaperman for forty years, Jim had been a wanderer, as much as he could be within the cramp of the daily obligations. They had worked together once on a St. Louis paper when Jim was a kid reporter, on the night police run, and Brunn was a rewrite man. Brunn was the best and the most colorful rewrite man Jim had ever known, and Jim himself had since worked on some of the fastest rewrite banks in the country, on afternoon papers where the pile-ups were murderous. Here, Brunn was city editor.

Brunn's sadly devilish face looked dark and frail as if with illness. But he was strong. He started to say something else, and

then flicked Jim's ear with the back of his hand and walked on, snapping his fingers and humming.

It was one of those days when Jim did not get out of the office. Crosse was gone somewhere on an assignment, and it was dull. Jim sat and smoked, looking over one of the early mail editions which Eddie tossed him from the city desk. On Saturday, the Sunday papers were going out in truckloads from the alley all day long. During the four o'clock flurry, he took stories from the men on the runs: the city hall man, the police reporter, the county man—a couple of Saturday morning court matters, not very hot but one of them foolishly complicated as were all of old Judge Watting's reversible hearings. It took time to untangle. The other was light, but it was in the court of Jack Maidstone, a friend of his, and he flossed it expertly, making it important. He thought of all the men he knew all over the city—America, for that matter—as well as in this long noisy room, sitting with their sins, but preoccupied unemotionally with the sins of other people. Whole professions devoted to the ballistics of the first stone.

But this dull Saturday, the next time Jim glanced out the windows of the city room the street lights were shining in far patterns all over the city, across the hills, under the darkening sky. By the time the night side came on the city desk, Crosse was back and they got out to eat together. They walked along a street filled with a gritty wind, and the store windows lighting up the evening intentions of all the faces. Most were vapid, but some were not transparent. Kerry and Crosse were headed for a garish cross-town street of cold neon delirium two blocks away.

Crosse was dark and hesitant, a little tired as they all were, but when he was interested he had a California flash that made you think of beaches in the summer and tennis courts in the late afternoon with the shadows of trees falling across them. Ten or twelve years ago Crosse had been a half-back, and once in awhile you met a man or three or four men at a bar somewhere to whom Crosse was still famous. A great blocking back, they told you, one of the greatest that had ever come out of the west, and they would start telling you about some of the big intersectional games—you could see Crosse, streaked and dirty, leading the way, you could see the stands coming up with a roar—but then these fellows at the bar would start arguing about what yard-line the ball was on when that play started, and you would lose it.

It was a cellar place where they ate that night, with a small German orchestra playing humbly. In this rathskeller there was a pathos of effort to preserve an atmosphere of old times, as if the good mellow times of the world had drained away into shabby corners underground, and maybe of all the people in the world only old waiters tried to keep them. Mugs of black beer gathered dew beside the steaks, and the heavy silverware was dented with years. There was a lot of noise all around. The Saturday night crowds were warming up. Crosse was depressed tonight, too, and talked to Jim about all the gardening he planned this spring.

Jim started to mention the girl, Anne Vollard, who had invited him to her party, and then he didn't. He had met her at the Crosses' house; and not having any idea what was going to come of tonight, he saw no reason to say anything yet. There was something odd about the girl. Her note inviting him to a buffet

dinner party was as blank and formal as if copied out of a book of etiquette, though the strokes of her pen were black and decisive and square, not like the beautifully clear boarding-school writing of his ex-wife. Talking to the girl in a corner of Dorothy Crosse's living room, he had had the feeling that she was frightened. Some deep and permanent fear. He had not been especially interested, not enough to ask Dorothy about it. But by long and workaday experience, he could sense fear. And she had one of the strangest jobs he had ever heard of.

When he and Crosse got back to the office things had picked up with the coming of night, and everyone was busy. Wooller the night city editor motioned to Jim and said, "Here's one I've got. An old galoot has found a postage stamp. It's worth a fortune if it's the stamp they say it is. He's a janitor."

"I don't know anything about stamps," Jim said.

"I do," Wooller said. Jim stepped back, lighting a cigarette, and looked under Wooller's chair. On the floor, propped up against the city desk, was a volume from the office encyclopedia. That was Wooller. Eddie, for instance, didn't pull things like that.

"All right," Jim said.

"Here's my dope," Wooller said, holding out a piece of copy-paper. Jim took it; it had some of Wooller's prim pencil-writing on it.

"Where'd we get it?" Jim said.

"Well, a neighbor phoned in," Wooller said, "but I talked to her myself." He stood up, very straight and frowning, with a slight important cough.

Jim shoved the piece of copy-paper into his coat pocket, and Wooller blinked because Jim hadn't read it. Back of them, the news editor began a series of mumbling groans: buried in his work, like a man in uneasy sleep, he thought he was calling a copy-boy. Wooller was afraid of the fast reporters on the staff, four or five of them, who had worked around the country on other and sometimes more famous papers. He had been an earnestly routine reporter. He had an almost visible set of mental blueprints which told him the exactly usual way in which each type of story should be written; he was a sign of the age of clerks, and more and more local college of journalism graduates were appearing even on metropolitan papers. If you were going to say what kind of a reporter he had been, you probably would do it in capsule: When trying to get color into his stories, like Jim and Crosse and Richter got in theirs, somebody had told him always to get in the little homely touches, but he would never write simply that a news character was eating something, he would write, "while munching" a sandwich or peanuts or whatever it was. Words like that. And any newspaperman with word-sense would grunt and know what you were saying about Wooller. A couple of years ago Brunn had made him night city editor; Brunn was not slowing down, yet, but he wanted to be comfortable, and with a weak dependable man on the night city desk he wouldn't have to worry about undercutting competition. Wooller knew the Tribune's rule-book by heart, he was fiercely sensitive to the policies from on high—he could smell the most minute change of policy through closed doors—and he knew the exactly usual routine which should be followed in each type of news situation. But you could always make his eyes blink in

that flickering way. It was too easy, there was no use to puncture the guy, so with an effort Jim looked friendly and interested. He forced the start of a smile but in discomfort it stretched fixedly, and everything was too friendly and too attentively interested. Behind them the news editor swallowed a mumble and suddenly bawled for a copy-boy: "Boy! O-o-oh boy!"

"I want to get the human touch in this story," Wooller said. "But I don't want us to forget the legal angles. I want us to go into the income tax angle with somebody from the internal revenue office, and there are two other angles I want you to talk to me about when you get back. Maybe three. This is an unexpected-fortune story.—What the heck, I'd have liked to write it myself," he said encouragingly, as if startling somebody and making them feel all warm inside with a whimsical remembrance of the unthinkable. And Jim patiently realized again that you couldn't puncture the guy.

Turning away, Jim asked, "Photographer?"

Wooller carefully tore two taxi slips, already made out and signed, off the little pad which he kept put away in a drawer.

"The photographers are all tied up just now," he said. "I want you to find out right away if the other papers are onto this story. If they are, I'll get a photographer out to you. If they aren't, I want this for a Monday story anyway. Make a date, and we'll have a photographer sent out tomorrow afternoon. I'll leave an overnight on it."

"All right," Jim said.

There were two taxis on the stand around the corner and the second driver held up his hand and grinned, but Jim waved back and got into the first taxi, behind a driver he had never seen

before, because he didn't want to talk any more to anybody to-night.

As they moved, and jolted and stopped, and moved again with the traffic, he was aware of the tight ugly muscles of silence around his mouth. . . . But his mind turned to images without thought, images of escape and of desire: a slatternly Indian fishboat lifting its bows off the wild dark coast of British Columbia, the silver and linen of a breakfast table on a train with the sunlight of high western country joggling and wheeling to strike your eyes as everything leaned to a curve, new cities where everything would be somehow different, and money. The images of lots of money, and the faces of unknown women, beautiful and slow. And suddenly from the images a sharp thought again, not bitter but sharp: He would be to hell and gone out of here if it weren't for Julie.

The address on Wooller's piece of paper was in an alley. It was an old house, once fashionable with the wooden scroll-work of the 1890's but broken now and black with city grime, and above its roof all around rose the scattered lighted windows of buildings as grimy. In the darkness of the weirdly sloping front porch, Jim found partly by touch that there were four mail-boxes. Under his fingertips they had the poverty-feel of stickiness and gritty rust. He struck a match and found the name he wanted on one of the boxes; it was lettered on a card in ink which had wept with many rains, and underneath the name the printing of the same trembling methodical hand said: No. 3. (UPPER LEFT REAR). The front door had a square of dirty frosted glass of an aged floral pattern, bordered by thin oblongs of dismal colored glass. He pushed open the door and went in.



It must have been a hallway, and it smelled of years of cabbage and washings and years of passing people who sheltering here had mended bitterly the ravelling edges of respectability. But the darkness also let remain there, like a discouraged ghost, the faint acrid dust of ancient richer times. Jim groped out for a bannister which he could not see, and the meager light from outside coming in through one of the strips of colored glass turned part of his hand visible, a clay corpse color. He found the bannister, and followed it upward. The stairs asked creaky questions of his feet in the pitch blackness, but there was the dimmest possible crack of light on the upper floor to the left. He knocked brusquely on that door.

The old man was flatly thin, and of a painful evening cleanliness. He stood outlined austere by fragments of light, one big veined hand holding the door open.

"I hear you've found a stamp," Jim said, wearily folksy.

"Why, yes. I have," the old man said in a scholarly voice shaking with modest importance.

"Well, I'm Kerry of the Tribune."

"Oh." He motioned Jim to come in, and they walked a few steps into the room which was cluttered with undramatic shadows and ugly furniture. The old man sawed a hand through the air, indicating hospitality, and said: "I thought you was maybe another stamp-lover."

Jim shook his head, with a faint smile. The old man stood frowning, his mouth becoming very stern, it was an immensely solemn moment for him; but his big fingers began plucking with anxiety at one of the buttons of his clean blue shirt.

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"So you're one of the newspaper boys," he said, but his

voice cracked on the knowing heartiness. "I wondered when you boys would get wind of it."

"Where'd you find this stamp?" Jim said.

Magisterially, the old man cleared his throat. He pronounced: "It was in the trash. Down at the Drury Building, you know." He gazed with stern eyes at The Press; but after a moment blinked because Jim didn't whip out a black-covered notebook and take down every word, like in the cheesecake advertisements. So Jim did pull a folded wad of copy-paper out of his overcoat pocket, and the old man looked relieved, but still doubtful.

"Several stamp-lovers of the city have come here to view it. Several prominent stamp-lovers of the city. To view it," the old man said, and fastened his eyes upon Jim's pencil. Jim made some wavy scrawls on the folded copy-paper. The old man gazed reverentially into the distance. He swallowed with grave pleasure.

Jim knew the Drury Building. An old warren of an office building in the lower part of town, and he judged that almost anything could show up in its trash. Especially if one of the seedy law-firms took a notion to clean out its files of fifty years, or one of the patent medicine companies, or a lonely-heart matrimonial bureau, or a doctor for men only.

"How long ago did you find it?" Jim asked.

"Two weeks ago Thursday, February nineteen, at eleven twenty-five A. M."

"Let's see it," Jim said.

The old man took out a spectacle case, worn, so that the aluminum showed at the edges. He opened it, and put on his

spectacles. "The time is approximate," he said. "I checked the boiler at eleven thirty-one. At that time I took occasion to refer to my watch." He hauled the watch out on the end of its long leather thong, and showed it to Jim. It was a large silver watch. He tapped it, looking earnestly at Jim, put it back, put the spectacle case back, and took a massive bunch of keys out of his side trousers pocket. He picked the keys over with great care and selected a very small one. Then he walked toward a corner of the room.

"It caught my eye," he said. He stopped, turned with sedate slowness, and came back. "It caught my eye," he said.

Jim made a squiggle on his pad of copy-paper. In a tone of wonder, innocent and profound, the old man said: "I might not have seen it at all."

He went on over to the corner. There in the half-darkness was some sort of sagging cabinet. He fumbled, and from it took an old-fashioned black lacquered tin strong-box. While he was getting it out and shakily being exact with his little key, Jim put a cigarette in his mouth. He thought restlessly that he was here only because of one day a week.—But little old anxious Julie, he thought, and her kind of little cap called a beanie . . . His lips shrank from a sentimentality he knew to be false and the tip of the cigarette twitched away from the match.

The old man had the tin box open and, holding it in both hands, he stood looking down into it with the quietness of a full heart. Jim thought that telling a story to a child, or talking to a child, should be like the smell of a pie baking in the oven and the ancient confused music of wild geese faraway and fading across a deepening sky. He remembered such a time. The stories he

told these days weren't doing Julie any good. They only made her sad, he thought. And as for himself—every Friday he went back into the past, and by the time he started away from the past it was Friday again.

"Well, here it is," the old man said.

The only light in the room was from a metal lamp of some patent, probably also salvaged from the office building trash. Setting the box down on the table, the old man adjusted the dented hood of the lamp just right to make a close round spot of brilliance and making the shadows all move down on the walls. He stepped back and looked, with his head on one side, like a studious impressario. He adjusted his spectacles, too, and then bending over again he took the stamp out of the strong-box and painstakingly placed it in the exact center of the circle of light. It was a bit of dirty cerise color.

"Now, I cut it out, off the envelope. I guess maybe I shouldn't of done that," the old man said. "You don't need to make mention of that—it's off the record."

"You're going to sell it?" Jim said perfunctorily.

"No comment," the old man said. He breathed sternly through his nose.

"Well, it looks pretty antique," Jim said.

"That's what I thought. That was my reaction, in every respect. When it caught my eye." The old man cleared his throat, and then measured every word: "This is a *genuine* antique postage stamp."

"Well, I'll bet you're just practically planning to retire," Jim said.

"No comment," the old man said proudly.

In the darkness across the room Jim saw a woman's face, motionless, in an open doorway. It had a meager knob of gray hair twisted tight on top of it, and a long bony hand held a wrapper together over her narrow breast. The face was harshly meager too, with cavities of black shadow: a face intent and terrible, ruined by avarice. As its eyes met Jim's, it floated back into the darkness and the door closed softly.

"What kind of a stamp is it?" Jim said. "I mean the history of it and so on."

"Now I'll just refresh my memory," the old man said. Out of still another pocket he took a notebook, obviously new, and opening it he consulted its pages. Jim glanced over his shoulder. There was a good deal of pencil printing on two pages, in the same methodical trembly hand as on the mailbox downstairs. After awhile the old man closed the notebook, holding the place with a knobby forefinger, and cleared his throat again. And then for an odd moment of fascination they were both standing there silently looking down at the stamp, isolated in its circle of light. Actually, it wasn't worth a god damn. You couldn't even mail a letter with it. Ignorantly, in wonder, they stood looking at something that people seemed to value so much.

Back in the office Jim called up a lawyer he knew who was a stamp collector, and from him got the name of the best stamp-dealer in town. He called the fellow at home, and then he called the home number of a friend of his in the internal revenue office. That phone rang for a long time without any answer, and so he called another man who worked in the internal revenue office, one of the legal staff. Then he wrote the story with unhurried

rapidity, a good half-column, with full quotes from the old man, making him say fluently what he should have said. As in most interviews, when they read it they thought they'd said it. With smarter people, you would use a key phrase now and again, four or five key phrases that they'd probably remember. Here it wasn't necessary. He just made the old man fluent. Wooller kept craning his neck from the city desk, but Jim didn't give him any encouragement.

The next time Jim looked he saw Wooller writing an overnight on the city desk typewriter. And so tomorrow afternoon a photographer would get a pretty girl from somewhere and put her in his car and go take some pictures. The old man would be all stiffly dressed up and the old lady would probably be dressed in her best too, but she wouldn't get into the picture and she would have something to be bitter about for the rest of her life. Wooller was still writing on his overnight when Jim tossed the story into the basket. Brunn and Eddie took Sundays off, so Crosse would patiently read the overnight in the empty city room tomorrow morning. Wooller wouldn't tell him about it now, because tonight Crosse was just a reporter, not to share the jealous mysteries of the city desk. Not until early tomorrow morning, when he could sit down as relief city editor. Wooller's overnights would take Brunn an hour to read on a weekday morning. Except he didn't read them. He handed them elegantly to Eddie.

Jim started to turn away from the desk, but pawing hurriedly among his litter Wooller handed him a bunch of obits and community club notices that Eddie had shoved off on the night side. After awhile Wooller took the story out of the basket and

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adjusted himself to read. After he had read it all through, he raised his eyebrows and scrawled Jim's by-line across the top of the copy. Then, the city room rocking with noise, there were the usual bunch of captions for art for the home editions; and at their desks side by side he and Crosse were finally leaning back to light cigarettes when Wooller yelled for Crosse and shot him out with a photographer on a highway crash north of town. There were supposed to be three people dead. At ten o'clock Jim got his goodnight from Wooller, and it was raining.

He had only one taxi slip; he saved it to go home on and took a street car. All the street cars were old and made terrific junk-like noises. At the back of this car, sitting on the end benches facing one another were some people who had been to a downtown party somewhere: six or eight middle-aged men and women all dressed up, and one young girl. When the car stopped abruptly at corners they would all jerk sidewise and suddenly be shouting at one another in cultured voices. All the voices would slide down at once into the kind of modulated accents you hear in something really worthwhile on the radio, and one woman had a *glissando* of a silvery laugh like an indestructible Coca-Cola glass bouncing daintily down a flight of stairs. They used words such as "snack" and "exciting" and "refreshing" and "undies," and one of their friends was "a grand person." Then the car would start and they would all jerk sidewise in the other direction, both rows of them, and it was as if their words had flown up and become plastered in loud colors on the advertising placards overhead.

After about fifteen minutes one of the families got up for the next stop. Turning, lurching, grabbing for her husband's arm, the

woman called : "Nighty-night for now," and then swept past Jim with a small, bright smile fixed on her lips. The young girl came next and staring straight ahead with haunted, haunted eyes, with tragically uplifted face but too much lipstick on it; she passed languorously, world-sated, between the rows of seats and people. Only once, when the car swayed, she became a young girl and reached for a strap with a lithe precision which was like a line of poetry. She was just past high school age; it was her little few years of inner drama before she became a suburban housewife. Their man followed them. He looked like a good joe. He looked as if he would be glad to get home and see how the furnace was getting along. "Watch it, Eloise," he said gently.

Anne Vollard's address was in an old part of town. After Jim got off the street car he had to walk three blocks. It was a poor neighborhood, almost slums, and the old brick fronts with ugly green shades half-drawn were decaying in the rain; but the pavements and the sidewalks had pools of colored lights underfoot as if the rain were only part way through with a miracle of transformation and the second half was begun too soon. There was a basement restaurant with red-checked tablecloths and three or four soggy figures, a couple of white faces, out of drawing in the mouldy shadows from two bare electric light bulbs. There was a spattered white-tile delicatessen where the meat looked like it was, dead flesh, and there were some saloons and a barbershop and several grocery stores, but the rain was kind, it came from the distances, and it turned everything veiled and shining like when you were a child and looked through the spiky shimmer of your squinted eyes at lights and people, to see how different they were. The wide cement doorway with the number

over it that he was looking for, belonged to a big modernistic building. A few of the windows were open to the night, and out of some of them came music, competing from several places—a monotony of two or three pianos, and resolutely a big breast-heaving contralto voice in whooping melodious shouts taking a run and sliding upward for a true high note but always flattening it, and a violin complaining somewhere else, near at hand. Sometimes they all concurred in a dissonance almost orchestrated, almost right for the night and the city and the rain. It seemed to be a building for music teachers, and sure enough on the directory in the lobby there were a lot of professional cards. Halfway down the second row he found a plain, engraved card with only her name on it and underneath in her handwriting Studio 318.

In the elevator there was a bulletin board on which was thumbtacked a typewritten announcement of a recital by advanced pupils of a Madame Bertha Engdahl, in the Second Presbyterian Church auditorium. Under the programme somebody had written *Bravo!!!* with a fountain pen, and somebody else had written *Congratulations!!—V.J.J.* Also, tucked in around the frame of the board were several notes, in envelopes or just folded pieces of paper, evidently a tradition of the place with those who lived there. Jim found Anne Vollard's door in the third floor corridor, and when she answered the bell she was not quite as he remembered her.

She had put on for tonight a black dress with a wide collar of white lace on her shoulders. That might have been the difference, it made her look awfully young, as young as the girls had been he had run around with ten or twelve years ago. It gave him a faintly wrong instant, but there was something else about

her which had a touch of unconscious quaintness—something which puzzled him, and brought her back up to a reasonable age.

He remembered her in a green dress with a short white jacket, heavily embroidered; she had been rather pale, if anything. There had been other women there, at the Crosses', and everyone talking. But tonight she was vivid, as a schoolgirl is vivid hurrying somewhere and suddenly stopping to look at you. Her eyes were like that. The quaintness which made her older was something else. The effect was confusing.

"Jim!" she said. "I'm glad you could come." She spoke quickly and very naturally as if it were something she had thought about quite a good deal, and had decided to say it and the way to say it. But in anxiety, she had awkwardly softened the J in his name, almost falsing it. Her cheeks became even brighter, and she swallowed.

"Hello, Anne," he said.

She had brown hair, straight and bobbed, and her eyebrows had the same feathery brushing of gold, so at first you didn't notice that they were as broad as they were. She was a little taller than you had thought at first, because she was not especially slender: she did not by far miss being sturdy. At first you did not think of that. You thought . . . creamy. And then you became aware that her hand was more living than other hands, and very strong, but you kept seeing her eyes. They were gray.

"—your hat and coat," she said. "I'll just—"

"This is all right," he said, dumping them on a chair which already had some folded coats and two hats on it. His own hat started to slide off and they both bent quickly to grab for it. Their fingers collided and for a moment they were both holding

it on top of the pile and looking at each other again. "There's so little closet space in these—oh dear," she said.

He was surprised to see how many people were there. About a dozen, in the studio. As always, there was a couple in the kitchen, leaning against the wall and talking, holding drinks in their hands. Around the main room, some men were getting up from their chairs, three or four of them, and some of the women were sitting with bright waiting expressions. But most of the people were standing gracefully, talking, in couples and in one cluster at a long table which ran under the windows at the far end. The table had been used for the buffet dinner but now it was mostly cleared except for the candles and some bottles and siphons and a bowl of melting ice. The people standing there kept talking, gracefully, but they were aware that somebody new had come and there were going to be introductions. Their voices got a sort of heightened consciousness. Anne was turning away, to lead him into the room, her hand at her side clenched on her lace handkerchief. One of the women, who was sitting alone on the divan—her party expression became a real smile, of amusement, and she lowered her face, half turning away. Anne said hurriedly, "Jim, this is—I mean Mrs. Gerdner, Mr. Kerry, and Mrs. Laurit and Miss Glaston, Mr. Kerry. And Jim this is Mr. Gerdner and Milton . . ."

"Micklethwaite," the small young man said stiffly.

"—and Christopher Springtree and Mr. Upke," Anne said, or at least it sounded like that. "And Madame Widdie, Mr. Kerry." This was an old, raddled woman, dustily rouged over the creases, in soiled purple silk and an astonishing black picture hat, and the only one there who was at all drunk. Leaning back

in her chair, she extended her puffy hand to Jim and at the same time her withered lips made a curious forward reaching; prehensile-pointed as a rodent's reaching for a crumb; as if unconsciously furnishing for herself the courtly kiss she had learned not to expect any more. "And now Jim—over here—there are more, please—" Anne said, and they went over to the cluster of people at the table. Two of the men drew themselves up, waiting; one man lounged even more at whimsical ease, a woman showed her forthcoming pleasure by blinking rapidly. Anne went through the introductions carefully and Jim was conscious again of a curious trait of the newspaper mind—automatically accurate about names when at work, it let names slip by formlessly at times like this, when it was not going to write them.

While everyone was still murmuring and then with bright sudden thoughts starting up conversations again all around, Anne unexpectedly whispered without moving her lips: "Oh, God, I never do it right, Jim."

They were standing uncomfortably side by side with polite expressions—both of them somehow out of place here, he thought, and for perhaps the same kind of reasons—and when he turned toward her she turned, too, lifting her face. He said:

"What?"

She nodded and then laughed, but that one soft sound had an odd little miserable catch.

"I always think of being a very smooth hostess. You know, sauntering," she said. "I meant to tonight. I meant to impress you."

The room was L-shaped, and behind her at the end of the L the wall was filled with a bookcase of bound music, shadowy,

not very tidy, some in manuscript. He saw her against that background; she became clear and whole, at once fully explained and more remote. Anne's job was playing the pipe organ in a big downtown department store. Her collar of lace was held together at her breast by an oval pin of heavy Victorian gold. On the black windows the rain crawling in sidewise gusts kept trying to wash away a little candlelight.

He realized abruptly that Springtree was standing at his elbow, carrying a new-mixed whisky and soda. "Here, Jim," he said. Springtree was a tall blond young man with oddly brutal-looking nutcracker jaws but a poetic lock of hair never quite falling over his forehead. "Thanks," Jim said.

He looked around, wondering where the piano was. He thought all professional musicians had pianos in their studios. Anne watched him for a moment and then her eyes followed his, as if trying to see what he was looking for. Then she was watching him again. Her eyes were enormous with silence.

"I was just—I'd expected a piano," he said. In a sort of cordial hollowness because he supposed it was the right thing to say to a musician he added, "I'd hoped you were going to play."

"Oh, no—" She smiled almost timidly to explain. "It confuses an organist to play a piano. I haven't had a piano for two or three years. I never play one any more. It con—I mean it's all different, Jim."

"Well, I just thought practice, you know, to learn the pieces, and all that."

"Oh, I practice in the store at night," she said. "While the cleaning women are there. It's—I can stay there as long as I like."

I can play all sorts of things then. I mean b-big music." She looked at him doubtfully, and swallowed again instead of saying something else that maybe she had intended to.

"Well, that must be swell," Jim said.

"Oh, yes. It *is*," she said earnestly.

They didn't get a chance to say anything else because somebody called "Anne—oh Anne!" and she hurried away with the eagerness and anxiety of an inexperienced hostess. You could tell she didn't have many parties.

This one was in full swing again, such as the swing was. Four or five of the young men—Springtree and the small young man, what-was-his-name, and a couple of others whose names hadn't left an echo in the mind—the boys had re-taken possession of the party. It was routine, it was practically middle-class folklore: the fiction-born tradition of the talented young man. There were thousands of them; it was a fairly new vein in American life. Jim knew all about it, he had had a whirl at it himself in his time, but not much, because he had always been working on newspapers and anyway he couldn't get away with it except with the most naive or the most lonely. He tried his drink. It was weak. They were pretty nice boys. Hell, he had been a nice boy himself. But the patter—it hadn't changed. Sensitive, it was: a little brooding, touched with loneliness, whimsically gallant because not really hoping any more to be understood. Jim finished his drink. You didn't often see so many of them in competition. The women were quieter.

"Here, Jim dear," said the woman on the divan.

"What?" Jim asked. There was a lot of noise all around.



"I am Mrs. Gerdner. Sit down. I said here is some whisky and ice and a siphon."

"Thanks," he said.

"I put them there myself before you came. I wanted to talk to you," Mrs. Gerdner said.

"Why did you smile and hide your face a while ago?" Jim asked. "When Anne was bringing me in."

She looked at him speculatively for a full minute.

"I am Anne's best friend," she said.

Over by the table, Springtree was taking it away from the rest of the boys, for the time being, at least. You couldn't hear what he was saying because all the people sitting around in chairs nearer at hand were talking too. It apparently wasn't a story he was telling: everyone around him had expressions of serious thinking. Jim thought it must be a cultural subject, though there were gestures.

Anne came back, out of the kitchen, but with only a nod and a little squint of her eyes at Mrs. Gerdner and Jim she went on to the end of the room and stood listening with the others to Springtree. She stood with folded hands, a bit outside the circle, looking properly absorbed.

"Who's he?" Jim asked Mrs. Gerdner.

"Something artistic, I believe. At the university. Music, literature, I don't know," Mrs. Gerdner said. "Anyhow, he's still studying out there."

"Oh," Jim said.

"It's funny. I know what he's saying. Not the subject, but the words," Mrs. Gerdner said. "Jim dear, what do you do?"

"I take long walks late at night," Jim said.

"I know," she whispered. "Tortured. Driven. What else?"

"I sit staring at walls, with rumpled hair. For that, I buy a big knobbly pipe and take my necktie off."

"Jim dear, does your daemon drive you on and on?"

"Oh God, I never heard that one," Jim said, and their eyes were friends.

Meditatively, they drank.

"Newspapering must be a hard life," she said. "I'm not judging by the movies, either, but I should think it would be very . . . uncertain, to be married to a newspaperman."

"You'd have to ask my former wife," he said.

"I know. I've found out all about you. It's agonized Anne, the way I've asked, everywhere."

She waited with a cigarette in her hand until he got out a box of matches and struck one for her. She took a couple of deep drags, flicked the ashes and said carelessly: "We're very fond of Anne. She has great courage. She's made a good life for herself, in spite of . . ." There was the pause of a nice woman refusing to recognize socially the vulgar intruder, Tragedy. "That father of hers, you know—"

"I don't know anything about it," Jim said.

"Well, maybe he'll never come back," Mrs. Gerdner said easily.

Anne, achieving for once the sort of imperceptible drift she admired in a hostess, had left the bunch at the table and was talking to a stray couple in the alcove. He saw again that when she approached her shelves of music, that tapestry of work, she became decisive and matter-of-fact, losing all the little air of hesitancy which otherwise had been a part of her.

He also began to notice—for such, perhaps, is the power of suggestion—a portly young man who was watching Anne much too lusciously. This young man had wise little-boy eyes, deep-lidded, and ripe red lips. He had been sitting in a chair, under a distant lamp, but now he got up and started toward the alcove. With each step, as he walked, he thrust his heavy head slightly forward, and his hands were carried out from his sides, without motion. He was mostly bald, but the back of his head seemed to have a great deal of very thick blondish hair on it.

“That’s Alleyn. Schultz, I think the last name is,” Mrs. Gerdner said. “No, Jim dear, I haven’t the faintest idea who or what he is. He is here with his wife. I think she’s the one out in the kitchen.”

Maybe Anne, too, had been aware of his eyes, for as he came up she turned quickly, talked to him vividly and warily for a moment—you could see her stammer—and then with a swift, uncertain smile she stopped, hesitated, and hurried off as if on an errand toward the kitchen.

Alleyn stood heavily, and then turning his back on the stray couple, walked over to the table. He shouldered up close to Springtree, paused to look at him; he said in a penetrating voice: “Oh, Christopher, you are a very *noodlum!*” . . . and bending over the table, stuffed his mouth with crackers and cheese. It was the first time his hands had moved.

Everyone smiled. Indeed, there was well-bred laughter, and Mrs. Gerdner whispered: “Jim dear, are you ‘a character’?”

Springtree, his head a little on one side, and twinkling palely and proudly, went on with whatever he had been saying. Mrs. Gerdner sighed.

"I suppose it's always one's relatives who say first that one is 'a character,' " she said sadly. "After that, it takes a great deal of energy and planning to live up to it. I know."

The other one, Milton—the small young man—could not, it appeared, hold a group by his conversation. His act was perhaps a more effective one. It seemed to be getting him somewhere, pretty directly. His act was to sit tensely, and then give a harsh little bark of laughter and say something to Miss Glaston.

But Jim was looking at Mrs. Laurit. She had every appearance of being a very nice woman, the flat heels and pullover sweater type grown older but retaining quite a bit of the quality. She was sitting curiously lax, a delicate and rather lovely color lighting her cheeks and throat, her lips slightly parted, watching Springtree with eyes another man should not have seen. Peering into his glass, sloshing the ice around gently, Jim found himself clearing his throat. But he was surprised when Mrs. Gerdner close beside him laughed.

"What?" he said.

"Nothing. But I'll tell Anne . . . Dr. Laurit is lecturing in England this winter. Oxford. Cambridge. I don't know."

It was the first name since he had been here that Jim had ever heard of before. "You mean this dame is the wife of—"

Mrs. Gerdner nodded. "But even if he were here he wouldn't be at a party like this. He'd rather sit around drinking beer with two or three men, or playing poker. But mostly he works."

Anne had come back and was talking to the old lady in the

black picture hat. The old lady had a bottle all to herself on a little pie-crust table with a pitcher of water and a bowl of ice. With the passing hours she had become more and more grand, more and more drunk, and more and more bedraggled. Sitting on a footstool beside her, Anne was looking up at her and talking, her eyes crinkled with fun and kindness.

"Old Widdie. She's the only one here who will ever really be anybody," Mrs. Gerdner said. "Pour me another drink, Jim dear. But years ago Widdie used to sing Sunday evenings at the Metropolitan. The Metropolitan Opera House, even if it was Sunday evenings. She doesn't even teach any more. She's on relief. I happen to know that Anne gives her five dollars a week. For her little luxuries."

Bending over Mrs. Gerdner's glass, pouring whisky on the ice, Jim thought that the best way of going to a party is through the eyes of a faintly malicious and wise woman.

"Here you are," he said. "Anne sounds like the right kind of girl."

"Listen," Mrs. Gerdner said. "Being a young woman's best friend and being invited to meet a new man in her house has its limits. It has a strict code. Naturally, I'll give a report on you. We'll have a long, long talk, probably tomorrow. But you'll have to find out about Anne for yourself."

The cluster near the long table was breaking up; sensing change, everyone else was looking attentive, and in the half-silence of pause Mrs. Gerdner's last three words rang loud and clear. Anne turned, one hand fluttering out sideways, and gave her friend a look of shining horror.

"Jim dear, go bring her over here," Mrs. Gerdner said calmly.

Springtree came from the table and flung himself into a chair and curled up, though he was a little too tall for it. It was a white cloth chair, and the heel of the foot tucked boyishly under him made a black mark on the fabric. With a big bony pale hand he tossed the lock of hair back.

Everyone was talking again, but Anne was gazing straight up at Jim's face. She had clasped her hands in her lap and her lace handkerchief was moist-looking and wispy.

Springtree said unexpectedly: "—but I'm *much* more interested in writing." With the uncanny telepathy of such a young man for knowing that he had been noticed and talked about, he included Mrs. Gerdner in his interested glance. "That's what I want to have a real talk with Jim about, very soon."

"Huh?" Jim said.

"I think you're going about it the right way. Getting experience on a newspaper," Springtree said. He smiled confidently. His teeth were small, and spaced widely apart.

"Mp," Jim said. Anne had lowered her head and was sitting still, looking at her hands. Madame Widdie daintily poured herself another quarter glass of whisky, and taking firm hold of the pitcher of water with her left hand, drank the whisky neat.

"—but it's all so very different. Maybe newspaper work would *kill* the sort of thing I'm trying to do," Springtree said. "What I'm working on now is a study—an interpretive study—of Herman Melville. It's not in verse form, of course, but it's like a chant. A tribal chant of . . . well, of the *past*, and the *future*. Many voices. It's already eighty-seven thousand words

long. For the Chorus, I'm using The People of America. Millions of voices. Chanting."

Mrs. Laurit, realizing herself, was now sitting precisely in her chair, powdering her nose. Sharply she said: "Mr. Gerdner, don't you think—the vital feeling of it?"

Mr. Gerdner coughed once, like a lion lifting his head at the sound of the beaters.

"I don't know much about things like that," he said modestly. "But it certainly does sound first-class."

"—but I've often thought, perhaps I ought to work on a newspaper," Springtree said. "After all, a surprising percentage of writers have. I've seriously wondered if to be a city editor for two or three months wouldn't make my writing more . . . more in touch with what ordinary people *want*. Not that I'd trim down my style too much for them, of course, but—"

Jim looked closer at the boy, and then didn't smile. But he thought of Brunn.

"No!" Milton said. He made a little desperate gesture. It secured attention. Even Mr. Gerdner bent forward to see better. "The big thing is to be free—Free, Christopher!" Milton barked it, and looked tensely at Miss Glaston. "I know, speaking for myself—don't know about anybody else—"

"Oh, but Christopher, I can't bear to think of you a newspaperman. Unless a critic, of course," Mrs. Laurit said. "I'm sure that Mr. Kerry understands how I mean that . . . I don't think he should think of it, do you, Mr. Kerry?"

"Oh, I wasn't talking in terms of creative writing. Not for the newspapers," Springtree said. "The newspapers don't even want it. We all know that."

"You are so impulsive," Mrs. Laurit said. "I'm—we're always afraid he'll do something to hurt himself, Mr. Kerry. He's so impulsive."

"Well, I don't know," Springtree said, weighing things in his mind. "You know, Jim, when I'm writing, I just lose all track of time. Hour after hour, all night long, sometimes. It's as though I couldn't stop. It's as though something were driving me on and on. Other times, it's as though a fountain had run dry, until I . . . *replenish* . . . whatever it is."

"And your writing is so lovely and spontaneous," Mrs. Laurit said. "You mustn't ever lose that, Christopher."

"Jim, do you agree?" Springtree said, all curled up in his chair. "I mean about—"

"Sure," Jim said. "Come on, Anne."

"—ha!" Milton said. "Thought!"

With Anne's fingers captured in the crook of his arm, Jim started back across the room, but Mrs. Gerdner, only glancing at them, said:

"What's the matter with thought, Milton?"

Milton flicked it away savagely. Moodily, yet tautly, he took two jerky sips of his drink and then pierced Miss Glaston with his eyes.

"Jim dear, what do you think about thought?" Mrs. Gerdner said. "Sit down, Anne. I think we should all think about thought. HENRY!—what do you think about it?"

Mechanically, Mr. Gerdner started. "Yes, dear. Rrrrghm . . . mp."

But like all parties it was picking up vivaciously toward the end, with nearly everyone talking at once, and Jim was halfway

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down his fourth drink when Miss Glaston drawled deeply and lazily that she had to go. Anne stood up, and Jim had an odd sense almost of physical loss as he felt the divan freed of her weight beside him. Everyone was standing up, more or less straggling toward the door, the goodnights dropping each one off where he stood casually and selfconsciously, so that only Anne and somehow Jim really reached the door with Miss Glaston and Milton. Jim was ready to help her on with her coat, but she didn't have one there so apparently she lived in this building too. Milton stood rocking on his toes, his hands clasped behind his back, looking over the heads of the two girls; once he worked his eyebrows up and down nervously.

"It's my fate," Miss Glaston said. "I have to leave every party early on Saturday nights. You know how it is, Anne, darling."

Anne nodded. "Cecile is soloist at Downtown Methodist Church," she explained to Jim. "She has to sing in the morning."

"Oh, yes," Miss Glaston said. "You'll have to come and hear me some Sunday, Jim. But you mustn't applaud, you know. Goodnight, Anne, dear. Such a lovely party."

In sudden soprano, clear and caroling, she ran through two or three bars of a hymn and ending with a trill, went out smiling. Milton bowed his head, frowning sternly in exaggerated mock reverence but with a little smile playing about his lips. With his fingertips placed stiffly together in front of his chest he wheeled and followed her, marching, making his feet tramp heavily. In the doorway, he turned to look back at them all with his little harsh barks of laughter, a vein knotted in his forehead.

Mrs. Laurit and Springtree were putting on their wraps, and other people all around were sorting out hats, coats and umbrellas. Springtree's exit was less—personalized. He was quite charming, waiting tall and straight beside Mrs. Laurit, but for a minute when he didn't know anyone was watching him, doubt and misery stood naked as Gemini in his eyes. Then he just went out quietly, mooching along behind Mrs. Laurit.

Among the other departing guests, old Widdie came tottering majestically. She found a rusty cape, bordered with remnants of black feathers; this she draped about herself with small feminine touches and settlings. Then raking the brim of her picture hat down over her former left eyebrow—an adventurer undefeated, now that she was old—she touched Anne's hand and with unexpected distinctness said: "My dear. My dear." And then she walked out without bothering to notice anybody else.

Nearly the last to leave, among the last goodnights, was the man Alleyn, with his wife. His wife was a flat-chested young woman, damply sensitive, with the weak-swollen, slaty eyes you sometimes see in an adolescent, and chapped-looking lips. She had thin, light hair combed straight up from her high forehead and held sort of standing up in front—to look like a lot of it—by a profusion of black wire hairpins visible on top and from the back. Alleyn stood looking sleepily at Anne. With dead hands he said, "The girl with the wedding-cake smile. One dreams on it afterward. All night." His hands moved. He took one of Anne's softly, and after a moment laid his other on top of it and pressed slowly but harder and harder.

Then they left.

"Well," Mrs. Gerdner said. "Well, well, well well well well— No dear. We're going too. No, lambie, we'll talk later. I'll call you in the morning as soon as I can get Henry out into the garden. HENRY!"

"Yes, cookie," Mr. Gerdner said.

He came and tucked Anne's arm through his. But Mrs. Gerdner, saying goodnight to Jim, became demure and formal.

". . . so happy. Anne had mentioned you," she said. "Goodnight. Come on, Henry."

"Here we are," Mr. Gerdner said.

After they had gone out Anne stayed at the open door much longer than was necessary, her back to Jim, until they both heard the elevator close and the long mechanical sigh of its beginning descent. Then she closed her apartment door with great care and turned around.

"Oh, dear," she said.

"Well, I guess I'd better be going too," Jim said.

"Oh, but your drink is only half finished," she said quickly. "Don't you want to sit down and—I mean if you want to."

"I left it on purpose," Jim said. "I was hoping you'd notice it. If you hadn't, I'd have discovered it."

She was confused, and smiled uncertainly. With a sort of lame surprise he saw that she was not accustomed to a whimsical candor being used as the opening, though it had become perhaps the most fashionable one. The elfin, or Little Boy Blue, approach. It was limitless.

She said, with a too sudden carefree smile, "Well, fix me one, too. That is—please do. I wonder if there's any ice left."

She peered worriedly past his shoulder toward the table. "I hope so."

Looking at her, he knew that she didn't want another drink but thought it was the thing to do, to be bright and companionable with a man. It was as if, with uncertain anxiety, she was acting out of guesses she had pieced together, out of books she had read. It was astonishing.

—Even if it was an act. If it was, it was a new one, and the best he had seen: the most pleasantly disturbing.

"Look," he said. "Suppose I help you with the dishes. I'm an old hand. You don't want to get up on Sunday morning to—"

"Oh, *no*," she said. "Mrs. Quist will—I have a cook. She'll come in tomorrow. She promised. She fixes dinner and then leaves because she has a family."

As he was about to kiss her he paused for a second looking at her eyebrows, broad and strong. He saw them a little startlingly because her eyes were closed, for the first time since he had known her. Her waist was wider than his arm had expected, with a lovely human solidity that caught his breath, and her back was so straight that it was hard to tell which of them was trembling slightly. But her lips, quite cool . . . here was real candor. They were lips which ordinarily spoke of work, or were laughing with other women—they were breathless now but still literal—as lips to a man's, they were only awkwardly responsive, a little scared, and serene.

He stepped back, catching his heel on the edge of a rug, and then steadied himself. She stood where she was, but opened her eyes. There was nothing to say.

After a moment she looked past him again, not quite smiling, and passing so close beside him that her skirt brushed his hand, she walked the length of the room toward the table and the row of windows.

Following her, he found a few rounded nubbins of ice-cubes floating in the bowl. There was a little drift of ashes at the bottom of the water from somebody's spilling cigarette, and he couldn't find a clean glass. So he took a sticky one out to the kitchen and washed it in the sink, between stacks of dirty dishes on both drainboards. Most of the napkins had wipes of lipstick on them. He remembered that there was nothing worse than midnight kitchens after a party when people didn't have very much money. He had never blamed his wife for getting the divorce.

That interval in the kitchen helped some, a part of their helpless selfconsciousness was gone by the time he came back and started fixing her a drink, but still they had nothing to talk about, they had hardly ever seen each other before and tonight everything seemed so sort of rigged up. He knew that he had been invited as her partner for the evening, the sort of quasi-host an unmarried woman giving a party seems to have to have to mix the drinks and steady things by acting as the man of the house. Usually an old friend was asked for that. He wondered if she had any. The only siphon-bottle that had enough left in it was warm, and dry on the outside. He remembered that, too, from when he used to try to get a peaceful drink after all the people had gone home from the parties in the house on the hill. It helped some more, it made him somehow more assured and

natural, to glance at Anne as he had used to glance at his wife over the wreckage in the living room. Her drink, when he handed it to her, was tepid, but strong.

"Ough!" she said. "This is welcome, Jim."

That was a little startling, that remembered tone—until you stopped to think that given certain circumstances all pleasant women say the same things.

"I don't know why people give parties," she said. "I don't even like to go to them, much. Oh—this room! I wish I didn't have to see it in the morning."

He was feeling more and more at home—if he had shut his eyes and only listened to the words he would have been magically at home again—but with his own drink in his hand he thought he ought to talk to her, about something she would be interested in. After all, he was a guest. He knew practically nothing about music, though. Half the names and terms he did know he was shy about trying to pronounce to a professional because he had encountered them almost entirely in reading. And she wouldn't know about the things he knew about—they hadn't yet any of the little mutual background which a man and a woman set about building so quickly and with such small anxious touches. Once she was looking at him, and then a minute later seemed to be laughing though she was turning to set her glass down and he couldn't see her face very well. He said hastily:

"Look, I'd like—can I see you again soon?"

"Yes. Almost any evening," she said honestly.

"Well, I—Friday's my only day off. I work late afternoons and nights. I just never can go anywhere evenings. Like tonight—you saw how late."

“ . . . oh,” she said.

“It makes it awkward,” he said.

“It . . . yes,” she said. “It is awkward, isn’t it?”

With a start of something like horror, it occurred to him that perhaps to her this sounded like a run-around, as if he were trying to weasel out. With hurried loudness he said:

“Next Friday!” She gazed at him wide-eyed. Modifying his voice, he said: “Could you have dinner with me? And we could go to a show or something, or dance.”

“I’d love to,” she said.

“But that isn’t soon enough,” he said. “How about Tuesday afternoon? Tuesday is one of my late nights this week. I don’t go on until six.”

“Oh, yes,” she said. “I’d love Tuesday afternoon.”

From a quick thoughtful flicker in her eyes he guessed that she was thinking about her job.

“I’d forgotten about your job,” he said.

“There’s a woman I can get. She’s a radio organist. We help each other out, sometimes.”

“Lunch, then,” he said. “I’ll come by for you at twelve.”

“And there’s a concert,” she said. “At Civic Hall. I—I think you’d enjoy it.”

“Fine. I’ll look it up and get the—”

“No. I’ll phone for the tickets. I know the people. I’ll just have them saved for us at the box-office,” she said earnestly.

“OK,” he said.

Not gracefully, they moved toward the door. He got into his overcoat, and stood holding his hat. Uncertainly, she started to put out her hand. When he kissed her this time she was tran-

quil, but giving—her lips saying so simply it was as if spoken, “Goodnight,” in the sense of “Sleep well, my dear.” That was rare, in this world, between men and women. There are not many blessings.

## SEVEN

*The taxi he got on the corner was damp* inside from the coats of previous people and there was a cigar, scarcely smoked but dead, on the floor. It rolled, until Jim put his foot on it and crushed it flat. To accompany it, there lingered in the wetness the skin-burned fragrance of a violently subtle perfume. Together they were like a dialogue between people whom you couldn't see though their presence could be felt, and you didn't need to distinguish the words because the tones were the same in the evening of every city in the world.

It was a long way downtown but the streets were wet and nearly empty; the watery singing of the tires, like the briskness of crickets, emphasized solitude. When the taxi pulled up in front of his hotel he gave the driver the taxi slip and a quarter and went in through the newly varnished lobby. Behind the desk, the night clerk looked up expectantly. He was an elderly man but still jaunty in a bright brown double-breasted suit which made his shrunken figure look strained and uncomfortable, and a loud splash-colored necktie. He always walked alertly—



but the effort turned it into spryness—and he looked at people dynamically, with a piercing smile only slightly apprehensive. His slang was painfully up-to-date, but once in awhile when Jim asked him up to his room for a drink, he would stand with his glass in his hand and unconsciously in conversation come out with some elderly turn of phrase. Once, he had said, "A word with a friend is a great favor, toward the small end of the night"; and once, "I call to remembrance—." And, as unconsciously, for a moment when he didn't have to front, weariness and doubt gave his face a strange dignity. From the way he looked up to-night Jim could tell that he wanted to talk, or maybe be asked up for a drink.

"Well—Mr. Kerry!" he said in his brightest greeter's voice.

Jim nodded.

In the mirror beside the elevator door he saw the clerk turn away, and bend over his ledger again.

But he didn't want to talk to anybody. He just smiled faintly, with tired habit, at the university boy who ran the elevator at night, and rode up staring at the cracked linoleum on the floor. In the seventh-floor corridor there was a woman coming toward him. He had seen her before, walking ahead of him one afternoon with her husband and her two children: a little brother and sister, big-eyed and subdued at being in a hotel, slowing down and putting their heads forward to gaze cautiously side by side into a half-open door, but being shooed quietly along. The mother was a quiet woman, quite thin, with a sort of middle-western outdoor looseness in the way she walked. She was not particularly pretty, one way or the other, but her face had a

humorous sweetness; her hair was smooth and neat with two small knobs in back. Tonight she was alone, hurrying a little, probably on her way to the housekeeper's room down the hall. Perhaps one of the children was sick or needed something. She passed Jim shyly, a little awkward with singleness, at being without her husband in a hotel corridor at night. She made you think of a house on a small-town street. There would be lots of trees, and pleasant smells coming from a kitchen window on summer mornings. Jim thought: I could be married to her, and she would be beautiful to me because I knew her so well. But would I be wanting something else soon? No—probably not—I have had too much else. With her, with such a woman, it would be a pleasantness and an end, to single down.

In his room he turned on one of the pink-shaded hotel lamps on his bureau. In that dusty light, he stood staring absently at the streaked grayish-green walls. Warily he wondered about Anne. He was not prepared, he thought, to be serious again; but when a woman can make her absence felt as an emptiness of heart, it is either be serious or forget it hurriedly. It is either the long, long emotional avenue, all the old familiar crossings and signposts and landmarks all lighted up again . . . like Christmas window-shopping over and over again with different companionship, and thinking, "Well, she's probably seen it all before, too, and as for myself, where the hell is the energy coming from this time?" but always the energy there fervently, and loquaciously as ever. It is either that, or decide not to go along again at all.

*But Monday afternoon, quite late, on his* way back from City Hall, he went into her department store to see what she looked like in her daytime surroundings, while she was at work. He walked with the flat irritated half-worry that comes with a flat story which you have to blow up into grave, civic-minded importance because of some policy of the paper handed down from on high—they were throwing the hooks into the mayor over a couple of million dollars' worth of paving contracts. Jim was a pretty good digger, but it was so hard to pry anything loose on this deal that the next step might have to be the shopworn gag of saying it was officially denied that a grand jury probe was contemplated. Sometimes it worked, sometimes it sucked county politics in and thus widened the story; and even if it didn't work it left an undefined stink, which was about all the paper expected anyway. After an hour in the mayor's office, mostly swapping political gossip with him, Jim had gone upstairs to the City Hall pressroom and over the Tribune phone had dictated a story heavily salted with figures which he had obtained elsewhere. By certain juxtaposition he was able to make them look fairly bad. Their City Hall man chewed his cigar and listened glumly; these policy stories made it tough on him, with minor officials, for a few days at a time. The police reporters were still with hollow laughter agreeing with police captains about that vice-collections story last week, which had not panned out. "Brunn was looking for you about

three o'clock," the City Hall man said. "*I didn't know where you were.*" Jim nodded and pushed the phone away. "*I've been in John's office,*" he said.

. . . But as soon as he went in through the doors of the department store he heard her music.

So vast was the store, and so modern, that the majestic subtleties of the great pipe organ were carried by concealed wires throughout the seven floors. The music issued everywhere from small, beautiful boxes, some suspended in mid-air, some exquisitely hidden, but each of a design and color to match its local decor. Softly the music came over the golden-lit perfume counter; perhaps more loudly in the beauty salon; God only, or an expert in sales psychology, would know how it came in over the counters of the bargain basement. Even in the rest rooms, both Ladies' and Gentlemen's. The small, beautiful boxes in the rest rooms were white enamel.

Thus pervasively, the sound of the pipe organ shimmered everywhere in the store except in the pale-blue and rose-velvet tea room a half a block long on the top floor. Opposite the toys and books. In this, the main tea room, they had a stringed orchestra of four, including a willowy virgin who played the harp, whose long thin arms were inconceivably nimble in the waltz, and who between times sat in a long drooping curve inside her white chiffon and occasionally touched with slow fingertips her golden hair. Jim knew because he once had taken a woman to lunch there. A jolly little woman who worked in one of the judges' offices. Nothing had come of it, she was all jollity; but anyway, he hadn't noticed the organ music at the time. He and this woman had been talking as they went through the store

to the elevators. He wished he had been a little less interested that day; he might have glanced around a little, enough to have some idea where the actual Anne was now.

Her music was everywhere, but he couldn't find the girl and the organ. He had to look for her. He wandered over the main floor, bumping modestly through softly obstinate crowds of shopping women, down block-long distances of richesses and lights and reflections, looking for her. He didn't like to ask a floorwalker. Young and unnaturally suave, or old and jaunty, each had a flawlessness which like cellophane enwrapped him—here in the depths of an eye was a Saturday night remembrance, and there lingered the middle-aged glaze of a Sunday afternoon with the married children, but at four o'clock Monday each floorwalker was a part of the store's titanic perfection, which with inhuman gorgeousness of textures was consecrated to the smallest human vanities. Once or twice, at a choice between immense perspectives among the aisles and pillars, a floorwalker half-stepped forward, looking helpful, but Jim shook his head and went on. It was a long wandering through glitter and crowds, changing colors and waves of voices talking, and at every turn her music, coming from a new and richer source; it was getting dreamlike, the waves of voices and the music sometimes louder and seeming to be faster and then in another place murmurous with an illusion of gentle leisure with all the colors softer and only the faces remaining hard and distinct . . . until around a corner into another part of the store the music steadied and became constant, and real, filling these spaces with its high windy livingness though coming from far away. Then he saw her. A long way off, very small at the gleaming shadowy

mass of the console, floating in subdued lights a little above the crowds and the hurry and the brilliant counters.

It took him awhile to get there. A sort of enormous shallow alcove had been built in one wall for the organ. It was roped off with a thick crimson cable of silk running between polished brass posts, and inside, a width of red velvet rug went up some broad stone steps to the console. Halfway up the steps there was an easel with a chastely lettered sign on it:

Miss Anne Vollard

at the

WURLITZER

Under beautifully dim spotlights which slowly, slowly changed colors by some astonishing hidden mechanism, and inside a low carved screen of wood which hid her legs, Anne was at work matter-of-factly at the four keyboards and the complicated patterns of stop-knobs and tab-like couplers. She sat straight and unknown to him in a pale spring-green suit with plain white cuffs and collar. High above her, a grilled gallery, large enough for a cathedral, was where he supposed the pipes were. Lonely as hell she looked, while she played.

Once in awhile someone passing would stop to look up at her, and then two or three or four or five other people would stop too, looking up with the seriously-blinking vague thoughtfulness which a sudden intrusion of The Finer Things seems to call for. Then, glancing around, everyone would hurry on. Only a child, dragged along by its mother's hand, wanted to stay.

While Jim was watching, a floorwalker drifting on an immaculate shoe-shine came to rest nearby, and with waiting face

and slightly bowed head stood bestowing the grace of the store upon the passing shoppers. Moving uneasily, Jim found him very near.

"Pretty, isn't it?" Jim said. "Er—very beautiful."

The floorwalker inclined his head still further.

"The Wurlitzer," he said, "is under the personal direction of Mr. Bemberg."

In line with the store's policy of Helpfulness, he waited a moment and then cleared his throat.

"In fact," he said, "Mrs. Bemberg often selects the programs."

For some reason or other, there was a little mirror affixed over the keyboards and stops of the organ, something like the rear-view mirror in a car. After awhile he saw Anne's eyes in it, and they were watching him. One of her hands, reaching to flip a stop, fumbled it nervously and then flew in panic back to the keys. It was getting dark outside, and the shoulders of people coming in were darkened with rain.

Anne played through to the end of the piece—it was a familiar one but he hadn't the faintest idea what—and then she stopped. She reached out and touched a switch, and the store was softly filled with the music of a symphony orchestra. That was from records, he supposed; he wondered how it worked. Anne was getting up from her bench, opening a little door in the wooden screen, and coming quickly toward him down the red-carpeted steps.

"Jim!" she said.

She started to put out her hand but he didn't see it at first because he was looking at her eyes and by the time he had got

his own hand out of his overcoat pocket and reached for hers she had dropped it hastily. But still looking at him she realized, and so their hands bumped awkwardly together and found each other. "I just happened to be by here. I didn't mean to interrupt you," he said.

"I can take a rest period," she said. "I'd—I'd love a cup of coffee."

"Fine," he said. "Where?"

"Well, the downstairs coffee-shop," she said. "It's the nearest."

They had to walk about a block through the store and then down a wide stairway, and on the way he tried to tell her how beautiful her music was. It was hard talking because people kept getting in their way. To talk about anything like that, which was her life, he thought he should have waited until they were alone. And what he said didn't sound right, anyway. So he shut up. The Christmas season was the worst, she said. She had one of the Santa Clauses beside her, and lines of children, and she had to play Christmas carols one after another, over and over again, all day long.

The downstairs coffee-shop swam in noise and Italian-pink leather and satiny expanses of pale wood. They found an empty table and sat down. He ordered coffee and Anne shook her head when he asked if she didn't want something to eat. "I wish I could. I wish we could stay here for a long time," she said. "But I can only be gone through eight records.—They are twelve inch ones, though." He looked at her face, trying to guess what it was about her father that had given Mrs. Gerdner's voice so peculiar a tone. He tried to see some mark or hint in Anne. There



was none, this afternoon. He had not expected to see it plain. The ways that people showed tragedy were familiar to him; they varied scarcely more, he thought, than the patterns of human disaster itself. It was possible that it took either a great mind or an eccentric one to achieve originality in either, and it was excessively rare. Dignity was as commonplace as tears, and more often encountered than vulgar uproar—even in shock, or even in a long nerve-breaking grind of horror and public pain. He remembered some abominable curiosities among the ways he had watched people showing grief or shame; but generally, the mutilations to which the decently believing mind is susceptible were received quietly, and very quickly concealed, though one suspected they were lasting. But in the lasting, the face became the shield of the mind—a shield worn well, and in time remarkable with the unreadable heraldry of unknown victories.

He said, "Your friend Mrs. Gerdner mentioned your father."

"Oh—did she tell you about him?"

"No," he said. "She was mysterious."

Anne sat drinking her coffee.

"I guess he's practically a confidence man," she said.

Her eyes caught Jim's, and held them. "In fact, he is," she said.

"Where . . . where is he, Anne?" he asked.

"The last I heard, in Mexico," she said.

"Oh. I just wondered. Things like that don't make a damned bit of difference to me, Anne. I know too many—odd people—and like too many of them. It's my business."

"I'm glad," she said.

"What's his—er, line?" Jim asked.

"I'm not sure, now. Sometimes there's a year or two when I don't know where he is. For awhile he was all down through the southwest—you know, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, places like that. Then this winter I heard from him, and he was in Mexico. Tampico, but he was waiting to go somewhere else. Jim, I do worry about him. And I was going to tell you, anyway. I—I didn't know just when."

But he saw in her eyes a more immediate fear than that of past disgrace. A live and helpless fear. It was there suddenly, and it didn't fade. She looked down into her cup. He thought that she started to say something more, but she didn't say it.

"Forget it," he said. "Everybody's got things they'd as soon not talk about. I've got a lot of things I'd rather you didn't know about me, but I've got a hunch I'm going to tell you every one of them sooner or later."

"Oh, well," she said in a small voice.

"Besides, I think your old man sounds interesting. I like people like that."

"You're being awfully sweet, Jim," she said. She stopped and listened to the symphony music. "That's only the fifth record," she said.

"So let's don't talk about your father any more," he said. But he wondered what her immediate and sharpened fear was about.

"All right," she said.

She didn't seem relieved. She didn't seem anything. She wasn't even particularly watching him to see how he had taken it. Of course it made no difference at all to him, except he was

more interested and curious; he had years ago quit seeing any lines to be drawn in a world of crooked glory, dishonest virtue, and disgraceful rewards; the monstrosities of life were workaday, for him; but he realized that it would make a difference to some types of young men, a young lawyer, for instance, or a teller in a bank.

"We'll have a good time tomorrow," he said. "I'll come by for you early."

"All right," she said.

He knew why she pretended to be indifferent, and he knew how thin the pretence was. He could see what the handicap would be—for a girl—and he could guess how often and in what ways she had been let down in wretchedness.

"Did you have any trouble getting your friend to play in your place tomorrow?" he asked.

"No. She's just a substitute organist around the radio stations. She needs the work. She was glad."

"Well, we'll have a swell day. I'm going to take you to the most elegant place I know of for lunch."

She smiled at him with her eyes. She didn't ask where it was going to be, and that was one of the minor flattering pleasantnesses of the intermediate stages in a man and a girl getting to know each other. Later on, if they went that far, they would argue about where to have lunch.

"Don't you get tired, playing?" he asked.

"Yes. Sometimes," she said. She looked tired now, a faint discouraged shadow about her lips. If they had been alone, and if he had known her better, he would have kissed her.

That, he thought, was another curious thing of the inter-

mediate stage. It was easy and sometimes natural to kiss a girl the first time you were alone with her ; and then came the stage when you knew her better but not well enough to kiss her again.

They finished their coffee and sat smoking cigarettes. He had an odd and sudden knowledge : neither of them cared very much just now what the other was thinking. They had gone in talk a little way, they had given each other partial and hesitant glimpses—they had approached unknown depths of each other in speaking of her father—and now it was a time to withdraw into the warm shallows of self, to feel one's mind subconsciously in a gentle and apprehensive introspection. That, he supposed, was why their conversation had limped off in commonplace bright disguises. When one of them would tap an ash from a cigarette, they would look at each other slowly, only a lifting of the lids, and only smiling slightly. Strange ; it was the first quiet time they had together. People were beginning to leave, it must have been longer than he thought, and she was listening to the music. "That's the seventh record," she said, and got up.

While they were grinding out their cigarettes, both their hands at the one ashtray, she said, "Don't b-bother to come with me, Jim. I have to hurry. I have to find some music that I have put away."

"OK," he said.

"We always play them out of the store with something slow and spiritual. I mean we do now. We didn't use to. It was our efficiency director's idea, and so we had a conference about it one morning with Mr. Bemberg," she said.

Her hand was brief and firm in his, but then looking at him

with painful earnestness she said, "And it's really true—I have some new music for it put away in my brief-case and I've got to go through and find it."

In the wide doorway, in a jostle of tired women, she looked back at him and her lips said "Tomorrow."

## N I N E

*When they came out of the auditorium after the concert, onto the wet pavements shining with the late gray of Tuesday afternoon, she slipped her hand into his. She had a slicker on over her gray suit, and a felt hat pulled down over her eyes against the wind. Presently, as they walked, rain began to trickle from her clear oilskin cuff down their wrists, making their clasp moist and slippery.*

Her fingers tightened unconsciously, as Julie's sometimes did when she was about to ask for something she had been thinking over for several days.

"Jim," Anne said, "you've always been awfully footloose and . . . and strolling, haven't you? I mean, Dorothy Crosse told me you've always—"

Looking down at her hat, at her profile blunt and beautiful in the rainy wind, he started to answer. It would have been easy, and too cheap, to answer her as another woman might have ex-

pected, leading, either way, into a dialogue of hushed and broken drama, building up a little fake sexual suspense. But there was something about Anne, the way she acted, the things she said and the ways she said them, which had puzzled him ever since he started thinking about her. He came now to the astonishing discovery that it was innocence.

"I watched your face during the concert," she said.

Shocked—and pitying, for she knew so little, she guessed so badly wrong—he said quickly, "It wasn't that." He thought: The pathos, anxious and wistful, of one human trying to make out the secret motivations showing on another's face, on a face in which one is interested. He had had his share of it.

With a quick compunction, he didn't want her to have any of that because of him. That, at least, he could protect her from. It was little enough. But this whole chain of slight feelings was uneasily disturbing. He was getting in deeper than he wanted.

"What is it, Jim?" she asked. "Is there anything the matter?"

"No," he said. "Something I have to do Thursday night. A dirty assignment."

"Do you want to tell me about it?"

"No," he said, thinking how typically feminine that was, and how mistaken women were in offering that sentimental, ancient, and possessive comfort, which they so fondly believed in. "I'll tell you about it sometime," he said. "But not now. It would ruin your afternoon."

"It's ruining yours."

He shook his head. "I'm used to it. Things don't get me, any more."

"Your face looked awfully queer," she said. "During the concert."

Well, perhaps it had. He wished she could understand that it really would ruin his afternoon, hopelessly soil it, to tell her about this assignment. He had been trying to block it out of his mind, but if he couldn't do that, at least he didn't want to talk about it. So often things—the most luminous things, like a first afternoon with a new girl—were overcast with sickly horror for a newspaperman by what he had to do: like a Christmas tree heaped all around with garbage. Yesterday evening, after he had got back to the office, Brunn had come over to his desk and stood looking down at him.

"Jim," he said, "Friday's the date for the Bronke hanging."

Jim had sat hunched over his typewriter, not yet picking up the printed official invitation from the state, and the railroad tickets which Brunn had clipped on to it. He had forgotten it was time for that. It had been his story from the night of the murder, a year and a half ago, and he had even got kind of friendly with the little old guy during the trial.

"OK," he said.

At a corner where the lights were against them Jim and Anne waited pressed close together in a little crowd of umbrellas and cultured talk; but there was nothing coming down the side-street except the wind. Low in the west, behind the rain-darkened old roominghouses around the auditorium, the clouds were breaking up in a wet and stormy yellow light. Someone started across the street and the crowd followed in an unwilling straggle, as if blown from the curb by a gust.

"Jim," she said, making a long stride beside him to clear a

puddle, "sometime will you tell me about all the places you've been, and all the newspapers you've worked on? Dorothy says . . ."

"OK," he said. "—I mean, sure, of course."

"I've always been right here. Working," she said. "You've seen. It's—it's all there's been." She walked along steadily, but slowing down. "I wish I could hear about you," she said. "Everything. From the very beginning. I suppose it's funny. Is it, Jim? I've been so blank about people, generally. I've hardly thought about them."

Her transparency continually astonished him. Furthermore, it had an erotic effect—a secondary one, of deep welling protectiveness—although it also scared him. He hadn't supposed there had been a girl of her age that untouched for fifty years, and he began to have an idea of its powerful value upon his grandfathers. "No, there's nothing funny," he said.

He was familiar, if she was not, with that early and forever futile sadness which was one of the first stages, and one of the most lasting, of really falling in love. Somehow he didn't feel it any more, that fuming misery to share at second hand the lost and unknown years; perhaps he had outgrown it—or perhaps, he thought with shamefaced shrewdness, it was because with Anne there was no need to feel it. Her years had been empty. As she said, an hour and you knew her life. With her he was safe. It was rotten to be pleased that she had been so lonely, it was worse to see calmly that she was miserable now; for the first time in his life the advantage was on his side. He didn't know what to do with it, and suddenly he resented its obligations. He had wanted,



if anything, a casual affair. And yet for a long time he had been indifferent to the women among whom he might have had one.

"Jim?" she said.

"What?"

"Have I . . . said something wrong?"

He turned his head quickly, but she wasn't looking at him. Before he could answer she said:

"I guess I don't know how women . . . All I could do was tell you the truth. Even if it's dull." She managed a shaky laugh. "There's no mystery, I guess. Is it so very necessary, Jim?"

Good God, he thought with a feeling of cold perspiration between the shoulder-blades. But he said—and it was the first time, with her, that he had taken refuge in an expertly tender line:

"You know, you're rather a darling. I . . ." He cleared his throat. "Damn it, Anne, don't talk nonsense."

"Then is it because there are things you don't want to tell me?" she asked. "I mean, that's all right, Jim. I was . . . just curious." After two more steps she added, between her teeth: "Dearest."

He pulled her under a dripping awning and putting his face close to the brim of her hat, pretending to point out something in the lighted dimestore window, brushed her cheek with his lips. She smiled faintly, knowing what he meant, and said "Dearest," again in a clearer voice.

"That's better," he said.

They walked on, her hand now in his overcoat pocket with

his, and after awhile he said, "There isn't much to tell. But I will. There's part of it that's a three-drink story, and we haven't time this afternoon."

Even if he tried, for her, he could never be so transparent as she was—the possibility was lost in noisy and dusty years—but he did find that he, too, had an impulse toward truth to her. For some reason it seemed important to him.

As a penalty for his sins, it was so damned complicated by this time that he didn't know how to sort it out, even to himself. One of the hardest jobs on earth is to go back on a careless life. It is like having to reduce your standard of living, but harder.

She glanced at him. Her eyes were troubled and unhappy, with a trouble that led past him.—It included him, though, the smoke-distant eyes of a woman worrying will include a man before she ever lets him know, in a tenderer mood, what it's all about. He knew now what the immediate fear was—but more disturbing, he knew the basic conflict of her emotional mind. Which in its subtle clashings, perhaps only dimly heard by her, had with its changing tensions at a favorable moment caused her to elect Jim Kerry before either of them was aware of it. Looking back through his own experiences, he thought that the actual moment of falling in love was often as unknown as the actual moment of a conception—a sort of an analogy reversed in time—and people were often as surprised when the process began to make itself manifest. He wondered to what extent it was still subconscious with her.

As to the thing that was terrifying her just now, it was very simple. She had told him at lunch. Over their dessert she had wanted to talk about her father again. But differently, far differ-

ently, from the way she had talked about him yesterday. Understanding that, too, he had listened.

Tonelessly she had mentioned, "He was a lawyer here. They disbarred him. He . . . comes back once in awhile."

She looked carefully at Jim's face.

"Hell, why let it worry you?" he said. "It isn't so bad. I know much worse than that."

"A lot of the time it isn't so bad. I've got so I don't mind it much—really—when I don't hear from him, but I dread hearing from him. Why can't he let me alone? Why can't he let me alone, now? . . . But he'll be back," she said suddenly and bitterly. "Now, of all times."

"Maybe not," he said.

"Oh, yes. I know he's on his way because some women have called me up and asked me if he was here yet."

"Oh."

"He's rotten. He may charm you, he'll try to charm you. But he's rotten. Remember I said so."

She waited a minute, biting her lip, and then in a faint voice came back to the basic trouble: "It was an awful scandal. I remember it. I guess everybody else does, too."

"Not I. I never heard of him," Jim said cheerfully.

"But—you could look him up in the back numbers of your own paper."

"Oh, really?"

"I . . . supposed you had, by now . . . I really think you should, Jim."

"All right. Sometime."

He knew that she had thought about it, maybe sleepless

last night in bitterness, having to explain to a man she had just met—always having to explain, before a relationship could deepen, to give people a chance to draw back if they wanted to. So the bitterness had grown, since yesterday, and now here it was.

“—But I thought somebody would have told you,” she said. “Everybody knows about it.”

“People forget. Things happen, and someone goes away, and people forget. Next week there’s a big hooraw about something else. Nobody remembers.”

He had sometimes thought of the afterlives of people who must live on after news stories. Some loud, brief uproar of disgrace or of tragedy, and then the papers and the public mostly forgot; and the family was left, their world in ruins, to live on in some sort of daily routine. He himself had times innumerable walked away from such stricken people, a story over, and sometimes he had thought about them. For them there was still a living to be made, for the women there were meals to be got, and dishes to be washed, and houses to be swept on gray mornings. Usually, after the average story, you never heard of them again. But here, in Anne, was an example. Left over from someone else’s story, some time in years past.

He had leaned across the luncheon tablecloth and asked: “How long ago did it happen?”

“Seventeen years ago. I was eleven.”

“Oh, for God’s sake. No wonder I never heard of him . . . Well, you’ve done all right, Anne. I’d say you’ve got along fine.”

"When he went away without telling anyone, Mother and I were left. She went to work."

"Is your mother—?"

"She's been dead nine years."

Abruptly, she too had leaned across the little table: "I'll tell you about some of the things he's done."

"Not now. I don't know why, but not now."

She had glanced around the small and intimate restaurant, at the women eating near them.

"Jim," she said. "Do you know the most terrible thing about evil? It's weak."

Well, she had had many years to think about it. And from things he remembered, he knew what she meant. Evil, the kind of evil she meant and maybe all evil if analyzed to the bottom, was weak and formlessly, formlessly persevering: seeking the strong for its life, but hating, too, in its unacknowledged heart, and ready to damage terribly when strength—of simplicity, of devotion, of wholeness—stood in its way.

"He'll always come back," she said.

The manners of her voice, tightening: the harsh constrictions of pain, and fear. You didn't need to look at her eyes; and, anyway, they couldn't be anything but clear. He realized, calmly, that for most of her life she had had a sort of father-horror, which by the simplest, the most elementary processes of time and the lonely mind had become—to what degree subconsciously?—a vaguer sort of man-horror. Horror . . . not quite. Fear, dislike; perhaps still less. A wariness of the unknown looseness of men.

And now this girl had the illusion, or wanted the illusion to be made for her, that he was not like that. Jim, she awfully wanted to think, Jim was different. He understood that psychological accident (it might have been anyone, at this point; she was ready), and he was filled with pity—an alarmed pity.

Aside from the hurts her friendliness had received from cautious young men—how often—she had been lonely because she was not for loose and wandering men, like her father; or the ineffectual, like the local artistic crowd who were mostly either old or willowy men. Something in himself had captured her imagination that night at Dorothy's, and she wanted, in him, solidity. She knew so little. His name was in the paper . . .

He realized what he was getting into. But—

He made her gray eyes waver by indifferently offering her a cigarette. "Where's the waiter?" he said. "We'd better settle up and be on our way. It's late." It is always depressing to look for the secondary motivations in a love affair—that is, a sincere love affair.

But there was another element in that afternoon—the one he had brought with him, like a sickness of thought. It would remain for him the predominant element, in remembrance, so that perhaps all his life he would wince away from remembering too clearly his first afternoon with Anne. It had happened before. One time a girl had been completely spoiled for him because the night before he had had to cover a bestial sex-and-dismemberment murder—the worst he had ever seen. That girl, the one he had a date with, had been very young, about seventeen, a sorority girl at the university. She had been merry and swift, he had loved the way her hair blew from her shoulders as she came to meet

him, and maybe she had wondered why he never called her up again.

And this afternoon in the half-filled auditorium, when he and Anne could no longer talk, he had become more and more conscious of the little man who was going to die a few minutes after midnight Thursday night. The concert was a showing of a big music school, a famous foundation, with eighty or ninety pupils playing as an orchestra; the soloist, at a long somber piano behind the conductor, was an exceedingly inconspicuous young man, pale blond and sick-looking. They were pretty good, Jim guessed. The piano had unsuspected molten thunders against the lifting, the blowing veil of orchestral tone, and Jim sat shimmering with sickness for the strangling heart-beats of being alive and the blackened slow bubbling corruption of death. It lasted a long time, the music, and in the middle of it Anne took his hand. He could feel his palm wet and cold in hers, for he was thinking: One step and waiting, the faltering of a heart, before mystery is gone from the flesh. All fury and love and pain wrenched away, leaving only something motionless and strangely negligible which a little before had walked. Yet thinking of any death—his own, some night alone in a bed—the terms were the same. The living body—his own, his own, or the endearing warm solidity of a woman's—he clung to Anne's hand for a moment, and then dropped it. Hastily she took it back to her lap. Her program trembled slightly as she bent to read, peering in the sonorous half-darkness.

The body, and the physical act of death. Once on a story, through drowning, he had been far into death, far, beyond pain, beyond the sound of his heart. Once he had had to stand, waiting

for imbecile death to come in a clap of flame from a pistol held between his eyes. Other times and other places he had watched the faces of the dying. There was nothing to see, usually; once in awhile, the contractions of pain, nearly always the same muscles automatically contracting into the same grimace so you knew it was probably only the physical nerves. But somewhere behind, he knew, the little blind white animal of consciousness, spinning and flopping around and around upon itself. Formless and frantic, in a trapped and sightless spinning, faster and faster, blinder and blinder, lighter, lighter—a scrap of paper, aimless, whirled in a wind, gone . . . The piano was speaking, and all the violins falling away, shivering away from an utterance somber, hesitant, and powerful with some man's thoughts upon the dignity and the beauty and the importance of man. After awhile it stopped, leaving a deep and fading humming upon the air, and people pattered their hands together.

. . . So now, walking through the gray streets, he became aware that for half a block Anne had been stealing queer glances at his face.

"Jim," she said, "how did you happen to be a newspaper-man?"

"Because my father was one. I guess," he said.

Along the sidewalks the pools were splashed by swifter and poorer feet. A high school somewhere near was out. A voice calling in a street, "Davie! Davie . . ." and the sagging ugly street was filled suddenly with the voices of the young. But going farther and farther away, a long running call: "Davie—wait, wait a minute."



*At a few minutes to twelve the twenty-four* witnesses standing around the warden's office and anteroom sort of shuffled together. They made a many-footed noise going through the concrete corridors of the administration wing, following the warden. They walked in an uneven bunch, but sticking close together. The warden was a solid man, well built, but not large; he wore a banker-like doublebreasted gray suit with a soft pinstripe, and rimless glasses, and he had graying blond hair, slicked down and brushed glossy. Up near the head of the straggling bunch a man said: "Well, it's a long dry stretch. Tom, I'll buy you a drink soon's it's over." Nobody else laughed, and the man cleared his throat, gulping off his own hearty chest-tones. But at a narrow steel door leading into a main part of the penitentiary there arose a murmurous too-polite rumble of voices—"You first," "No, go ahead." "After you." The warden was the most courteous of all, like a host. Only the doctor didn't pay any attention. He was a fat man, with short legs, and he walked right on ahead alone. You could see one ear-plug of his stethoscope sticking out above the top of his left-hand coat pocket.

There were faces gray at the bars of steel doors against individual darknesses on either side of them as they walked along through these wider corridors, but none of the faces made any noise. There were a lot of guards around, standing at sentry intervals along the corridor, but maybe none of the faces would have said anything anyway. Hearing his own feet scuffing along

the concrete with the others in the bunch, Jim was a long way off. He felt a sleeve, an arm, brushing and bumping against his—funny how they all stuck close together—but Jim was again taking refuge in his own deaths.

The time he drowned. It had been late at night, a windy night with gusts of southwest rain, as you get on the West Coast. A floater had been found by the harbor patrol off Pier 42. Well, a week or so before a society woman had disappeared so Jim went from police headquarters to take a look at this floater. Away off at the end of the pier a bare electric light globe was shining in the wind. Telling his taxi to wait, Jim was following the walk on the edge of the pier, feeling his way along the high wall of the vast shed and looking at the distant light. They had been repairing the pier, and all of a sudden he was falling. He had time to gasp once, but it must have been a yell, and then the flat wet noise of hitting the water and then the most profound silence turning into a slow pulsating roar and he kept on going down and down and down. He could feel the ice-smooth of the water moving up through his clothes and slickly upward, smooth, over his face. After the first terrible strangling it wasn't bad at all. It was like taking dentist's gas, that whirling pulse of buzzing in your ears and concentric rings of light widening out faster and faster in time with the buzzing from a brilliant center of light which you knew was pain. That was all there was to it, except you were terribly sleepy and the water kept moving up solidly, smooth, over your face and through your hair so you knew you were still going down. There *was* a sort of pause, somewhere, in motionlessness, and some sort of obscene and weary struggle, but you didn't pay much attention to it, you just knew, well,

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your body was making a silly commotion, and it disturbed you. Then you were lying in the wet under the electric light, and that light really was pain. You had something hard over your face and you were clawing at it and a man's voice said, "He's all right now. Take it away." There were a lot of firemen and harbor patrolmen standing around, and his taxi-driver. Some of them were bending over him, their big faces looking scowling and anxious and then starting to smile. Suddenly, it was strange, he loved everybody, every dear richness of people being alive, the gruff voices, the smell of whisky with the round cold O of the bottle sliding around under his nose trying to find his mouth, the rough kind hands lifting his head. He thought of restaurants and music and good clothes and women waiting, looking back and smiling and—his body made his hand knock the bottle away and his head turned, wrenched away. The floater was lying beside him on the oily planks. It wasn't a woman. It was a man, it had been a man a long time ago. It looked as if that swollen body were taking a deep breath, too, because the breast of the coat lifted up and up, and then a crab's claw came out of the abdomen and Jim's consciousness spun into darkness again as he vomited. —But the dying itself hadn't been bad. Not after the first strangulation. He could think about it as dying because he had. If they hadn't pulled him out, if his body had just stayed there in the bay and died he wouldn't have experienced any more. It helped, to think now how easy it had been. Hardly any pain, after the first. . . .

They all went into the room, and sat down decorously, pulling up their trousers a little at the knees, clearing their throats. They sat in wooden chairs, in two rows. The big echo-

ing room was painted a dirty salmon-pink. Nobody knew why. There were steampipes running up one wall and as your eyes followed them you saw that the ceiling high above was painted a darker dirty salmon-pink. But the tall wooden structure took up more than half of the room. They didn't have the modern equipment that some of the other states did.

Well, so they heard them coming, another little bunch of feet coming down another corridor, from a different direction. Then they were there, in the doorway. They had taken his glasses away from him. He came in, peering. He stumbled against the foot of the wooden stairs, somebody guiding him, and then he felt out with his hands, groping for the steps. In one corner of the room was a wheeled stretcher, an old one with some of the white paint chipped off, and on it a black rubber blanket folded up.

Jim tried to think of the other time his own body had been at death. That would help, too. An ex-con, a three-time loser, who had sworn to get him because of the stories he had written. Jim tried to remember when he had stood waiting under a flaring gas-jet, he had seen death in the small opaque eyes, pig-stupid and marbly . . . He quit thinking. It was too much. It didn't work any more.

Above them the little man with a funny name stood waiting. The hands of three men were fussing about him, adjusting, and then the hands of just one man. They were big and careful hands, and they took time. The wide straps gleamed dully which held the little man's arms down to his sides and legs, making a thin artificial figure of him. The black bag tied over his head was blowing in and out, in and out, faster than you would think a

man could breathe. Once, sucked into the mouth, it outlined the structure of the skeletal lips. When the old-fashioned mechanism let go it made a loud and inane clang, like an ash-can falling on concrete.

## E L E V E N

*That Friday as she came into the little* park, Julie saw her father already there, on their bench. It was a great surprise, and she hurried.

She cut across two curving paths, and ran toward him on the wet grass behind the bench. Under the bare branches, he was sitting with his hands in his overcoat pockets. His head was turned a little, staring out over the city. It was gray here on the hill, but deeper shadows lay over the valley, melting the very dark buildings and the smoke together, with a few lights. And beyond, from the railroad yards, a slowly moving column of steam rose tall, bowing its head gravely as it faded—like a legendary figure of alarming powers, vanishing respectfully in a story as it left a blessing and a gift which you'd better think twice about. She always saw things in that way when she was with Jim, or even when she was just hurrying to be with him. Never with anyone else, and hardly ever when she was alone. Running hard around the end of the bench she said, "Oh, Jim—I've kept you waiting!"

He took his hands out of his pockets, but when standing at his knee she lifted her face, he only smiled and said, "Hello, honey," not kissing her. As when her face was sticky from eating candy. But, no—it was more like in the old days when he had been working on the car and didn't want to touch her because his hands were dirty. She looked at his hands: they weren't.

"Well, it hasn't been much of a week for me," she said. "Nothing new. No hundreds in anything."

"That's too bad," he said. "I mean but it doesn't make any difference, about the marks."

"How has it been for you?" she said.

She thought at first he hadn't heard her, in the odd absent-minded flatness grownups sometimes had; but after a minute or two he shook a cigarette out of the package he had been fishing for in his vest pocket, and said, "I didn't get any hundreds, either."

The tone of his voice sounded more like her Jim, so she slid up onto the bench beside him. "Oh me," she said comfortably, "it *is* exhausting, isn't it? But as you always used to say, Jim, time makes all things sequel."

"Equal," Jim said. "Did I ever say that?"

She nodded. "When you used to be arguing with—when you were arguing. You talked about time quite a lot. It was a favorite of mine, the way you used to say time is a great factory. You sounded so sad, it was wonderful. It was my favorite story, that one thing—that one thing you used to say. I could see it, a great big building like a clock but more enormous than any building, with smoke and clouds all around it, and everything, everything coming out of it new. I never heard anybody else say

it. I used to think about it at night, and get the shivers. Of course, I was much younger then. I don't get the shivers any more when I think about it."

"Factor," Jim said faintly. "But don't believe it. It isn't true."

"Oh, we know what stories are," she said. "But that was a beautiful one, Jim."

"Well, here," he said, and from his farther overcoat pocket pulled out a lumpy paper bag. It was heavy in her hands, and she held it, feeling its weight, looking up at him. "I smelled them going by," he said. "They were just making them."

Inside were two apples on sticks: one heavy with caramel, the other the glazed kind with the greeny-red smoothness showing through. This one she held to admire; it was such a light, she thought, that must have shone upon the Golden Apples of the Hesperides, though probably a different variety of apples. The caramel one she bit into, feeling too late that it was making her face sticky. "Thank you, Jim," she said.

He was looking down at the cigarette, burning nearer and nearer his fingers. "Yes. We know what stories are," he said. "What kind would you like to hear today?"

Away out, across the valley, beyond the city, on the hills the clouds were standing down in rain. It was like curtains, far off and dark, which presently might part, the wonders to disclose. And then as she watched, the curtains—the curtains of the imagination—had vanished away, and the rain was like great Beings, shy and powerful, standing on the distant hills, waiting for Jim to tell their story. It could be a story of passing wonder, far away, and of gifts that made all things seem right: for he

was looking at them too. But she said: "Whatever you want to tell me, Jim."

Nervously he shoved his hat around to the back of his head, but kept his hand there, and after a minute pulled the brim down again, even lower over his eyes. "Once upon a time," he said. . . . "Look, honey, I've been away and coming back this morning the train came through a country of hills and water, and some woods. I was sitting in the smoker looking out the window, and went past a farm. It wasn't much of a farm, it looked like an old bachelor's farm, away out miles from nowhere, in the woods. But I saw something there, near the railroad tracks." She didn't know he had been away. She hadn't had a chance to see that morning's paper.

He said, "Last summer there was a wild plum-tree growing on a hillside. It was not a large tree, only a little higher than a man, and it was not of importance in the woods. But it was important to a bird, a gray sparrow of modest means, who slept there. To the sparrow it was a beautiful and suitable tree, that nobody had ever chased him out of—neither hawk nor owl, nor the jays who owned, or thought they owned, the larger and more desirable trees. They didn't bother with the wild plum-tree, it was so small, and, before its fruit was ripe, of a retiring shade of green. It was not very noticeable. But the sparrow could remember when it was all silver blowing in the second moon of spring."

Julie liked that. She thought: golden tree, silver tree. That was a nice thing about Jim's stories, they sort of fitted together from one time to the next. She sighed and closed her eyes.

"So this little bird, this wood-sparrow, and the tree. In deep



summer. The bird would come back from the meadow—I think there was a meadow under the hill, and he spent a good deal of his time there in the high grasses and the sun. The wind was beginning to blow the seeds. It was the good time of year for him, with his spring family grown up and flown away and nobody bothering yet about the social obligations of the autumn conclave . . . I've always thought that of all the forms of life the earth has brought forth, birdlife is the most wholly fulfilled and free and sanest; except for the terrors of the night."

She stirred and looked up at him, but he smiled and she knew that he had put that part in for himself. He said:

"Do you remember the birds in the woods around the cottage where we used to go in the summertime?"

"Yes. We used to watch them and you'd tell me what kinds they were. Remember the little book with pictures in it, and we would look?" she said. Carefully holding her apple she added, "I . . . haven't been back there since."

It was time to take a bite out of the apple itself, and holding it on high by its stick, she bit with great delicacy where the caramel had been nibbled and licked away. But even so, a slight dribble ran down her chin. She glanced up sidewise at him again; he was already holding out his handkerchief to her.

"This wood-sparrow would fly back from his noontime in the meadow—you know the way they fly, a little burst of wings and a dip and then another little burst of wings. So through the long afternoons of summer he was around and about, but he kept the wild plum-tree in mind. He would sing a bit now and then, when he happened to be there. And when the slow stars came the leaves of the tree would whisper all night long. All

the woods and lonely waters had their voices, too, but the leaves of his tree would whisper away the space and the mystery, and he would sleep. I think the world-spirit whispers at night to its children that pain and fear, the talons of hawk or owl—the talons of death—will come as naturally as the sun and the seeds and the use of wings. But a friend may whisper ‘Not yet, not yet.’ ”

Watching his face, she had a queer feeling that this afternoon he was telling the story for himself. She had no way of knowing why, she didn’t understand, but she slipped her free hand into his, as he went on :

“Well, you know what an early fall we had last year. All the wood-sparrows gathered in flocks when the leaves were falling from the wild plum-tree, and after the frosts they had to travel out over the valleys to forage.

“The winter weather drove them very far, but a week or two ago they came back with the spring. But when this one sparrow flew to the wild plum-tree it was gone. It had been hacked off and only its small stump was left, with the mud trampled all around it.

“What I saw from the train window this morning was the little wild tree, its branches without any leaves, and it was stuck upright at one end of a patch of gray earth where somebody had planted a garden. There were strips of rags, old shirts and underwear, tied all over its bare branches to blow in the wind, and scare birds away.

“But a little old bird, a very gray sparrow, was sitting on one of its broken branches. Its friend had come back. Among the blowing rags the bird was singing. Maybe of the time when the tree was silver ; maybe that his song would make it bloom again.

Even man's attempts to make it ugly and a thing of terror hadn't . . ."

Julie waited. She waited quite awhile, but that seemed to be all of the story. And then Jim was looking down at her, not quite laughing, though his scarred eyebrow was raised very high.

## T W E L V E

*After he left Julie at the usual corner,* Jim caught a passing taxi and went downtown to the Tribune building. There was still three quarters of an hour before time to meet Anne. In the corridor by the files, overlooking the city, he met Crosse, walking along in his shirtsleeves.

"Brunn's been looking for you," Crosse said.

"Oh God."

"I think he just wants to tell you that you've got a bonus," Crosse said, "for your hanging story. They've got it up on the bulletin board. Jack says it's one of the best hanging stories he ever read. He says it's got the human touch. Five dollars." Jack was the managing editor.

"I'll buy you a beer tomorrow," Jim said.

He didn't go into the city room. The Tribune had a system of five dollars for the week's best story, three dollars for the week's best head, and a dollar apiece for two or three runners-up.

Usually on Wednesdays after that evening's editorial conference in Jack's glass-enclosed office, Enid the editorial secretary would paste up the winning clips on a big piece of copy paper and carry them fluttering to the bulletin board, and the reporters and copy-readers would drift over looking unconcerned. This was known to the staff as the Pisspot Pulitzer, but at such times the simplicity of their minds was quaint. Once in awhile, though, Jack would get enthusiastic about some story and in a sad voice award it a special bonus. Jim didn't go into the city room because tonight he didn't want to have to talk to anyone. He went to the door of the library and through its wooden-grilled window motioned to one of the clerks inside to let him in. In this hour between the day side and the night side there were a lot of people passing in the corridor, and just as the clerk unlatched the library door for him Jim felt a hand on his shoulder. He looked around and up at Brunn.

"Nice story, Jim. Your final filing was a pip. It's got the human touch," Brunn said, "without working up any sympathy for the criminal."

"Glad you liked it, Boss. Thanks for the five."

"Don't mention it.—I tried to get an extra five for you for catching the Final City Home replate with the actual hanging. That was fast work, Jim. But you know Jack, where a little dough is concerned."

"Of old," Jim said.

"I wish to God they'd hang 'em on our time," Brunn said. To him, everything in the world should happen at four o'clock in the afternoon, too late for the afternoon papers and plenty of time to make all editions of the Tribune. "Well, have yourself a

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good time tonight—your day off, isn't it? Have a drink for me, boy. My god damned stomach." He felt it experimentally in two or three places and went on down the corridor, humming, a tall and natty figure.

In an inner room of the library Jim found a drawer marked VOD—VOM in an aisle of the steel filing-cabinets. There were several cards for different people named Vollard; one for Anne with half a dozen lines typed on it through various years, referring to publicity stories; one of them when she became the organist in the department store. The date was four and a half years ago. Before that she was listed as having played in a couple of student recitals, sponsored by the music foundation, and then there was a gap. He could tell from the card that she had not played in theaters, but she might have been a church organist, for the routine stuff of the church page was not listed. Since she had been in the department store, however, she had played at two or three civic occasions—Community Chest rallies, a War Bond drive—the sort of gatherings for which local musicians are obtained through commercial connections. Vaguely it seemed to him that he had written one of them himself, from a publicity handout.

The man evidently her father was Vollard, Otis, J., and there was only one card on him so he couldn't have amounted to much. Jim sent a copy-boy down to the vaults for the bound volume of the Second Final City Home Edition for October seventeen years ago.

When he opened it to the smell of old newsprint, so quickly a dusty smell, he had a small and unexpected feeling of guilt toward Anne. He blinked, and then turned up Vollard's disbar-

ment. It had been a news story at the time, something of a news story—a couple of 8-heads on page one, then a few scattering stories inside, and finally a last 8-head back on page one. His disbarment proceedings had grown out of an insurance case—the card had cross-references back to that trial, but Jim didn't bother with them. The insurance lawyers had proved fraud to the hilt, Vollard's client had got a year in the pen, Vollard himself was accused of tampering with evidence as well as attempted bribery, and the whole squalid business was drearily and infinitely complicated as only such a scurrying and shrewd-eyed mess can be. Running quickly down the columns, Jim didn't try to disentangle it: but knowing how to read the signs in some unknown reporter's work he did get the certainty that Vollard had been on the shady side often enough before that. This time he had got hooked. He closed the volume with the feeling of weary shrugging, familiar to him as a newspaperman, that anyone would not only take such chances, but go to so much trouble, for so little money.

He found on the card later wire stories on Vollard, some since he himself had been on the Tribune but which, of course, he hadn't noticed. He didn't take the trouble to send for any more volumes of back files. The card told him enough, in listings over a good many years. A wealthy widow suing him in a small town in Indiana; Vollard vanishes. Vollard missing from his brokerage office in Pittsburgh; Investigation looms. Vollard sues woman for false arrest in West Virginia; Case dismissed. Accused in Arizona mine-swindle; Two partners convicted, Vollard acquitted. He was apparently a shrewd dealer. 100,000-acre irrigation bubble collapses in West Texas; Vollard and

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mysterious blonde companion sought. Plans for huge Los Angeles faith-healing center vanish as Vollard from Mexico defies seeress. There was a follow on that: Seeress jailed for assaulting promoter; Vollard denies love angle, congregation pays for missing cash. Famous lost mine under city hall of Whippoorwill, Tex.?<sup>7</sup>; Town agog, Vollard threatens injunction. Diamond meteors in New Mexico desert; Promoter bars women stockholders from expedition. Arizona cattle-heiress on stand refuses to tell age; defies relatives, broadcasts appeal for Vollard to come back.

Jim decided that the old boy had amounted to quite a bit, after all, and put the card away. He let himself out of the library and went on down the corridor to the elevators. Anne had told him to meet her at the store. She said she had things she could be doing until seven o'clock, and it would save them each the long trip out to her apartment and back downtown again together. She could tidy up at the store. Carelessly, but with a barely perceptible trace of demureness, she let him know that she had a key to the women executives' rest room on the top floor, which included a really lovely powder room. This was the first mention between them of rest rooms. It ushers in the second, or natural, stage of man and girl. It is a definite landmark.

Walking across town, Jim for some reason realized how much he missed the sense of belonging to a child, as an everyday part of life. Or to children; it would be fun if there were two or three in a house, a small house with dented and familiar furniture and a yard outside, with trees. It was abstract, that emptily missing sense of children, it hadn't much distinctly to do with Julie or their sadness; with an almost imperceptible shock he

found that it didn't especially include her. It was too unspecific an emptiness, and perhaps he had schooled himself too long not to miss her more than he could help. This was a generic loneliness, for just children, for having them about with their heedless torrential noises but eyes suddenly watching you to see how to behave like grownups; with their little anxious beginnings, their minuscule worries, their wide-eyed wrong guesses, apologetic hopefulnesses, and pains which only later may be explained. To a man who has been a father, the usual sentimental pictures are surprisingly irrelevant—the face of a child asleep, with the petal-curves of the lips, the twilight hour (which as a matter of fact is usually the noisiest of all, because like birds they try to make the day last longer); the patter of little feet (much more likely to sound like an avalanche on the stairs with probably a tin fire-wagon coming down with them). The colored-calendar pictures of childhood, the heart-throb ideas, have the least to do with the way you feel about children, though they are part of it. But instead your mind remembers little humans trying, with funnily limited opportunities, to join full-sized humans on the edges of an unknown world, though living mostly in a brighter world of their own where only an humble mind can join them. And your hands remember the weight of picking up a child who jumps to help you; they remember the feel of little living ribs, and the beating of a heart.

Anne was standing in the half-darkness of a doorway, one of the side-street entrances of the store. She looked as if she had been waiting a long time. Jim hadn't a watch, but he supposed he was late. To one side of the doorway in a show-window there were two very modern women dummies, with hands lifted, with



fingers poised, in attitudes of delighted surprise. All bathed in a golden light. On the other side of the doorway, Jim was passing the mouth of a tunnel-like alley from inside the vast building, out of which in daytime came the store's brown and gold delivery trucks. The steel roller-curtain had not yet been pulled down from the shadowy stone arch high above, so that in the far depths he could see some loading platforms with bare blue-white electric lights burning above them, and a freight truck unloading. From away inside there, a heavy man in a brown uniform, with a holstered pistol and a large metal badge, was walking slowly this way, smoking a cigarette. In the doorway Anne had turned, and was seeing Jim. Their hands touched, they smiled uncertainly; and their hands clung.

" . . . Jim," she said.

"I'm sorry I'm late," he said.

"Oh, I've hardly been here a minute," she said. "I guess I came out, anyway, early."

She had on a short, loose gray coat over a copper-colored suit that he had never seen before, and a little round gray hat. She looked somehow about eighteen years old, that awkward shiningness, but her fingers in their soft gray gloves had a quick, strong sureness of him that did not show in her upraised face. Though to him, hers were still hard strange hands, different in tempo, and pressures, and the feel of shape, from a woman's hands his fingers remembered. The recessed doorway was in half-darkness because the small panel show-windows on either side of the locked doors were dressed very, very artistically. One had gold boxes of candy in it in dim blue radiance; the other had boxes of stationery in dim green radiance. And a curi-

ous thing was happening to Jim; standing there, no longer touching her, he experienced an intense consciousness of Anne. Strangely, little by little, he began to feel her deep presence, breathing, waiting. The stillness of her untried breast, the silence of her tremulous mind which was filled with surmise—he began to be permeated, his nerves and his body, with a sense of Anne, her powerful, her gently drawing potential. And slowly, Anne closed her eyes.

At the sound of a step on the sidewalk almost beside them, they both turned. It was the heavy man with the holstered pistol and the large badge. He had exchanged his cigarette for a toothpick. "Oh—Herbert," Anne said. "Herbert, I'd like you to meet Mr. Kerry." Jim shook hands with him and they all three stood looking at each other with decorous good-will. "If—if Mr. Kerry ever comes to take me home when I've been practicing late, you'll let him in, won't you, Herbert?" Anne asked. Herbert touched the brim of his semi-police cap to her, and to Jim said, "OK, Bud. I'll remember you."

As Jim and Anne walked on down the street, she said, "I read your story this morning. Was that why you were so . . . odd the other afternoon?"

"I guess so. If I was odd."

She didn't say anything else about it. He glanced at her, and was grateful. It had taken his wife a couple of years to arrive at that semblance of understanding, but even then she still had an inexperienced woman's bright interest in horrors. Sometimes when he was kissing her or wanting to make love to her he knew that she was absent-minded with the most vivid curiosity and was wishing he would sit down instead and tell

her all about the details of some gruesome mess. He knew Dorothy Crosse was like that, too. It gave them endless important conversation, highly confidential, for their bridge parties, to know the inside of some big running story, it made them objects of fascination to their women friends, and they never could learn why a man who had to deal professionally with human horrors wanted to keep a beloved woman set apart from them.

Jim and Anne went to one of the big hotels for dinner, where a famous name-band was playing for dancing. As they went across the lobby with its colors and lights all swimming in heights and distances and noise, one of the assistant managers came hurrying after them, clapped Jim on the back, was introduced to Anne, and walked with them up the wide baronial stairs to the entrance of the main dining room. With his hand on Jim's shoulder again he told the head-waiter, "You'll take good care of Mr. Kerry, what ho, Raoul? I'd have a drink with you, Jim, but I'm just on my way home, and we can't have supper till I bring the pork-chops." He smiled at Anne, and left. Anne's eyes were very big as they followed the head-waiter the length of the dining room to a prominent table where with ceremony he whisked away a large dark-red RESERVED sign, but Jim's face was impassive. He saw no reason to tell Anne, until she should find out for herself, that a reporter who works long enough in a city not too gigantic, so that his by-line gets to be known around town, enjoys among undertakers, politicians, assistant managers of hotels, press-agents, ministers of the Gospel, and publicity men for cemeteries, and in restaurants, police stations, bars, and sometimes in his own apartment house, the respect accorded to a local sports figure or a colorful personal fame

similar to that of a commissioner of streets and sewers. He would as soon that Anne didn't know yet that the same brush which touched a vaudeville actor in the palmy days, still touched more lightly a fast reporter. He had never told his wife, either, that when he came home from the office on Christmas Eve with several bottles of Scotch, three or four had been sent him by undertakers and one from the office of the largest cemetery. And he didn't think he would ever tell Anne.

He found that she liked old-fashioned, but while they were drinking them he was conscious that a curious flatness had fallen between them. Their table was on the edge of the dance floor and near the orchestra and while the crowd poured bumping by he watched Anne covertly over his drink. "When the loud clashing of dulcimers stops, I'm going to ask you what's the matter," he said.

She shook her head, but laughed.

After awhile, though, as if finding some tangible reason for the strange lassitude of nerves which perhaps neither of them understood, she said she had been angry, and she hated to be angry because it always gave her a headache. Several more women, four of them, had phoned her apartment to ask if her father was there yet.

"Maybe it's the same woman calling in different emotional conditions," Jim said.

Anne said no it wasn't. Each time it was a different voice. One woman apparently hadn't believed her when she said her father wasn't there, that she didn't know where he was. This woman said but he had written her definitely that he would be

there, he had given her Anne's address, and she got insistent and a little shrill. Anne slammed the phone down on her.

Jim couldn't help grinning, but that wasn't the worst, Anne said. The worst was this afternoon. A woman had come to the department store, and waited around near the organ. Anne had noticed her in the mirror, and then had got to watching her because she was there for so long, just waiting around unobtrusively. Finally, at the end of a long selection, the woman signalled. Anne went down the steps and talked to her. The poor thing—somehow she had struck Anne with pity—wanted to know about her father. Anne was kind to her, and completely honest, and presently the woman just thanked her in a nice voice and went off among the crowds toward a main entrance.

"What was she like?" Jim asked.

"She seemed respectable," Anne said faintly.

Once during their dinner they got up and danced. Anne smiled and followed him obediently out onto the floor. But Jim was not a very good dancer. He thought it was preposterous to get up and solemnly dance in the middle of eating and digestion; he thought the working waiters and musicians would be watching with the same contempt he felt for the crowd if they hadn't got so conditioned to it they didn't think about it any more, and he found out at once that Anne was even a worse dancer than he was. She danced sturdily and stubbornly—but with once in awhile a strange airy lift and unconscious lightness which nearly lost her from his arm. As if even this music, in spite of her, was in her. After twice around the floor they went back to their table. Their plates were cold.

"I honestly don't like dancing," she said. "I never have, and I've never been able to dance. I'd love to learn with you, Jim, but I'm not sure I could. It's a fixed dislike, it goes back too many years."

"I know," he said. "It's the postures. Thick men being dainty, with their behinds stuck out. Also, women walking backward, springing a little. Their legs are ugly. The faces of responsible citizens solemnly going around and around in crowds. Kids are different. It's fun to watch kids dance. They want to, their bodies want to. It's awkward and beautiful."

"It isn't just that with me," she said. "I mean, looking ludicrous. It's a dislike with me of the physical contact.—Not with you, Jim . . . but even with you in public. But most men, casual men, maybe beaux or husbands of your friends, that you have to dance with as duty when you're with a party. I don't like to be touched. You'd be surprised, if women talked to you, how many women feel like that."

He knew what she meant. Women you wouldn't care to go to bed with putting their hair up against your face. But now that they were back at the table and not trying to dance any more he remembered the high softness of Anne's breasts and her human fragrance of youth and strength.

"With most men the physical contact means too little to be decent," Anne said, "and with one man it means too much to be decent."

They sat looking at each other across the gleamingly littered table and with complete candor Anne blushed thoroughly, but nodded with solemnity.

Not quite knowing why a very nice moment should make him gradually uncomfortable, Jim found his hand fidgeting with a worn piece of roll. His hand looked big and dark on the glazed linen tablecloth. Broad and gauntly muscular, it struck him with a sort of subsidiary surprise that it was not the hand of a boy any more, and it had a few black hairs growing on the backs of the fingers. The nail of the middle finger, his right-hand typewriter finger, was broken at one corner. He was confused, and selfconscious about the wrong thing.

What he had encountered, and was perhaps subconsciously unwilling to look at just now, was the most uncomfortable circumstance which occasionally overtakes a careless and drifting story-teller—the eyes of a woman offering him utter and permanent sincerity. It was a choice, offered him too soon, as women nearly always do offer it too soon to the modest and alarmed male. A choice between his lazily, his pleasantly emotional state of mind, all conveniently compartmented, and the exigencies of getting awfully serious and arranging things for a future.

Somewhere in the back of his mind he was pretty sure already that he wouldn't be doing much of the cheery travelling he had been thinking about lately—as the nebulous future from which he was held back by his and Julie's past—but much more acutely he became aware that probably sometime fairly soon he would have to do something about getting his two emotional areas into some sort of workable relationship—Anne's growing area and Julie's dwindling one. Thinking of Julie's poor secret world, and of Anne's helplessly honest eyes, he was suddenly filled

with small betrayals ; but he didn't actually have to explain anything to either of them right away, and that was as far as he let himself think.

They stayed for quite a long time over their coffee, smoking cigarettes and sometimes smiling a little at each other. For some reason, neither of them felt like approaching emotional ground again. It was enough to be together, and to look at each other with the shy beginnings of gentleness.

He remembered something, and asked her if she had ever played the pipe organ in a church.

"Oh, yes," she said. "For nearly four years, while I was a student. Also at funerals. Isn't that astonishing?—it doesn't bother you, does it, Jim?"

"No," he said. But he still wasn't sure he would ever tell her where some of the Christmas Scotch came from.

"I got twenty-five dollars a time. But usually less for weddings. I've never understood that," she said. "I used to look down at the bride, all lace veil and flowers, and down at all the dressed-up people, and with the most c-commercial feelings get my cue for *O Promise Me*.—Oh, damn it, you're trying not to laugh, it *was* all very churchy for awhile. But I could live on it, and finish school."

"I'm not trying not to laugh," Jim said.

After they left the hotel dining room they went to a large moving picture theater and sat peacefully holding hands, glad to view with drowsy disdain other, richer, but made-up emotional situations. Once when the darkness was filled with the gigantic husky voices of climax, Anne leaned to him and whispered:



"You tipped that waiter too much."

"He was a good waiter. He'll remember us."

"He probably sniffed at us. He probably thought we were newly rich."

"Darling," Jim said, "we are."

After the show when he asked her if she wouldn't like to go somewhere for some supper and music she said no, let's go home and have a drink there. And some supper if he wanted it. She would scramble some eggs or something and make some coffee. He said he wasn't hungry either, and in the cab she leaned lightly against him with his arm as lightly about her. He thought how strange, the little gestures of beginning tenderness that everyone makes are always the same and always breathlessly new, and as one grows older they disturb more deeply the less careless heart. She waited on the curb, shivering a little, while he paid the taxi-driver, and then they went in and up in the elevator and along the corridor, walking somehow very close together so their shoulders touched, but not holding hands. He stood waiting while she got her key out of her bag, and bending, with studious care unlocked the door. Just inside, with the door swinging closed behind them, she turned, holding up her face to him. His arm bunched her loose, short coat up in back. For a long moment she kissed him with motionless lips, but even here after the first second or two they became more gentle with each other, and by the time she turned her head away her lips were soft and just shadowed with an expression he had never seen on them before. She took off her little round hat and tossed it toward a chair. His hands turned her shoulders back toward him again, but this time she put her face against his chest, he could

feel her nose on his necktie, and they stood very still for a minute until he touched the top of her bowed head with his lips. Her hair was exceedingly smooth, and cool, but the part was warm.

She sighed, a small breath, and walked away from him without looking back. While she was gone, he found a brand-new bottle of whisky in a kitchen cupboard. She must have noticed the other night that he drank rye. Glasses were in another cupboard and there was a siphon in the refrigerator. She came back from the bedroom, fresh of cheeks and for some reason laughing as she looked in through the kitchen door at him.

"What?" he said.

"You're awfully thin, Jim. I'd never realized it before," she said.

He carried the drinks out into the living room and they sat on the divan tasting them slowly and smoking cigarettes. They were comfortable. She put her head back on his arm, and the line of her throat was beautiful.

"When can I see you again?" he asked.

"Whenever you like, Jim."

"My damned hours," he said. "You have to work all day tomorrow, don't you?"

"I don't dare get a substitute too often. Besides, that girl I told you about has some radio programs tomorrow afternoon." Anne turned a little pink again. "I already asked her."

"Well, may I call up and tell you goodnight when I'm through work?"

"Please."

"How about Sunday? I work till two in the morning, and that leaves me the whole day."

"Oh, dear—I promised to go out to the Gerdners for Sunday dinner. It means the whole day—Jim, I promised it away last Sunday, on the phone, and Mary would never understand. I mean she'd be likely to understand too much."

"Is that her name?"

Anne nodded, and looked at him with eyes of consternation.

"What do you care what she thinks?" he asked.

"Oh, my dear, you don't know Mary. She would have you right out to dinner with me, next week, and she would have Henry all primed, and he would take you into his den and pour you a drink and sound you out. We would all be horribly embarrassed but Mary. It would be awful. I just love Mary, but I won't have it."

"Oh, hell. How about Monday?"

"How late do you work?"

"Eleven."

"Oh, that will be just fine. I'll practice at the store until eleven o'clock."

"You're a darling," he said. "It's a date."

"I have an odd, tired feeling," Anne said not without a trace of savagery, "that if I'm to go on having dates with you at your hours, I will become a magnificently practiced musician."

Jim thought uh-oh, the old loving agitation for a day job. He had another drink, but Anne shook her head and sat curled up against him with his free arm around her. And at the door, the last thing, just as he was turning her loose to leave, she actually said it:

"Goodnight," she whispered. "Sleep well, my dear."

*But by Monday night he had had time* for a good many second thoughts in solitude, and when from one of the phone booths in the city room he called Anne to say goodnight he could tell that she had been having some of her own.

Now the second thoughts of a morning newspaperman are not thought, like other peoples', in the stilly watches of the night when the sense of a sleeping world all about gives a certain forlorn vanity to private black hours. His are thought much later, in a sleepless dawn, when bleakly he hears the city waking with great energy and sanity, when shipping-clerks, judges, market-minded housewives, surgeons, tax-office clerks, executive editors, stenographers, insurance salesmen, city planning commissions, chiropradists, economic analysts—all the hordes of alert and glaringly competent daytime folk—are getting up to breakfast and the brisk illusion of running the world for another day. This is peculiarly offensive on Monday morning.

Jim's second thoughts about himself and Anne were of the doubtful quality of this lonely hour, though sometimes overpoweringly sweet. They were like the pocket-worn little bags of candy he took to Julie, poor substitute semblances of what he would like to have for her. That was well enough for the emotional part of his second thoughts, it even had a certain pathos for him when it occurred to him—the easy pathos which always has falseness in it, even if it's true. On the side of human practi-

cability, the question of a permanent life between himself and Anne, his worries were greater. He had an experienced man's sober, delicate, and infinite apprehensions of a relationship which could not be treated lightly; he knew as she did not, that marriage means a damp-bathroom intimacy in uncombed moments when neither is thinking about love, and through years when every physical trait of the other is eternally known—that is something to occupy the mind when looking at a woman, however charming—and he knew that while high passion is one of the most possible human experiences, long tolerance is the rarest. But perhaps these considerations don't matter so much to women. They don't seem to. He didn't know what Anne's second thoughts were like, except that from her voice on the phone they sounded more frightened than his.

Jim got away from the office at 11:15 in spite of a one-day murder—a taxi-dancer found dead in a cheap hotel room with the left breast sliced off and missing together with the inside section of an afternoon paper—and as he walked through the night streets of midtown he had no thoughts beyond the bright tip of the cigarette in his mouth. At the department store he found the tunnel-like mouth of the alley open so he didn't have to ring the night bell. Walking through in the darkness his steps echoed under the arch. He went up an incline and along the steel-shod and splintery deck of a loading platform toward a lighted doorway. Just inside at a stand-up slanting desk Herbert was busy with some slips of paper, some pink and some white, and a soiled gray time-book. He had hitched his holster around toward the back and was smoking a cigar. On the wall facing him was a large rack in which small cards

could be slipped in and out of transparent slots ; some had green tabs on them, and some had red. Nearby was a machine holding a roll of narrow tape, something like the fire-alarm machine in the pressroom at police headquarters ; from time to time it would give a whirr and then tap out a code from somewhere in the depths of the store. There were also several large polished gongs on the wall, a battery of light-globes of many different colors, a square black machine through the little window of which one could see a needle designed to make cryptic jags in green ink upon a roll of graph-paper, and another black machine whose needle pointed to zero on a dim and complex dial. But nothing happened with any of these while Jim was there.

"Hello," he said. With an inquiring jerk of his head toward the inside of the store, he said, "I've come for Miss Vol-lard."

Herbert turned around heavily and looked at him.

"Sure. Go ahead," he said.

Jim went through endless areas of packing rooms where mountains of the most fragile and desirable objects were glittering—as if half the daytime people of the city had simultaneously been given three wishes, and a hell of a mess it was for somebody to sort out. After stumbling over rich rugs, banging his shin on priceless Sheraton, and stepping over a red coaster-wagon with a gold and crystal toilette set in it, but with a different-colored tag, he found a gray door. Opened, it proved to be jade-green with silver tracery on the other side, and he was in the store. From a long way off, he heard the organ.

It sounded different tonight. For one thing, the loud-  
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speakers weren't switched on, and also it was apparent even to him that Anne was playing a different kind of music. He didn't know what it was, but it didn't have the sound of opulent clichés stupenduously magnified to sugar the nerves of restless thousands. This time he didn't have so much trouble finding her though the store was dim. Guided by the distant music, he walked down long shadow-gleaming aisles which dwindled into far vanishing-points of perspective, but he knew he was going in the right direction because the sound kept swelling a little clearer and a little clearer. And finally across remotenesses of semi-darkness starred with vague refractions on magnificence, he saw her again. Before him, silhouetted against the small glow of light around the organ, a row of women's hands were held up, disembodied, but rigid as if suddenly frozen in an abandonment of dance; below them a soft topaz eye watched him immovably. After a moment, he saw a row of gloves on forms, and the jewelled clasp of an evening bag.

As he approached the organ, Anne didn't turn. He stood looking up at her, at her smoothly moving hands under the console light, but her shoulders moving scarcely at all. The music, here, had a profound humming quality which buzzed almost aching in the head, though broken by great voices as one of her hands slightly changed its position. At his feet a section of the crimson silk cable was unhitched from a brass post and was lying on the floor. Anne, with a swift motion stolen from the keyboards, patted the bench beside her.

He went up the wide stone steps, walking on the red velvet rug, and opening the gate in the low carved screen, slid in next

to her. One foot trod on some of the long wooden bars of the pedals; they gave under him and far away a mighty bellowing occurred, jangled and discordant.

"My goodness," Anne said, and turned her face to let him touch her lips. She was playing from a printed score, old and worn, with a good many pencil markings to the page. Also it had editorial footnotes printed in blocks of small type, and leaning closer to read one of them he gathered that this was Bach's B-minor Mass.

It was uncomfortable sitting down, holding his feet away from the floor of pedals; carefully he stood up and leaned against the console beside the keyboards. When she stopped playing, an immense and echoing silence crept back from the far reaches of the store.

"That was good music," he said.

She looked down at her hands in her lap. "It lets a mediocre musician know what it must be like to be a great one," she said. Their voices sounded small and flat.

"Are you a mediocre musician?" he asked.

"Yes, Jim."

Slowly she began changing the tabs of the couplers. They were in a curve about the keyboards: most of them were white, like ivory, but a few of them were colored. With Anne avoiding his eyes, all that they had both thought separately since Friday night gathered and stood around them in the silence.

"You shouldn't have been thinking us over," he said. He turned, looking helplessly for a place to put his hat.

From high above, from space and darkness, an almost inaudible whisper answered, airy, rustling cynically in the empti-



ness, and forlorn. He glanced at her quickly. One finger was just leaving a key.

"Don't be cross," he said.

The organ gave a profound groan, impatiently. Her hands hadn't moved. He suspected her feet. He said:

"Don't be factual, then. Be tender."

Her left hand made a little falling chime of other-worldly bells, ending at the bottom of the run with a sort of gurgling sigh.

"Anne," he said. "Look at me."

She wouldn't, but as she ducked her head the organ loft was suddenly filled with piercing whistles.

"Anne."

Remotely, the organ said something hollow and noncommittal.

"I've been thinking too," he said. "I think I love you, Anne."

With her head still bowed, she hesitated. Twice her hand started to move. Finally she touched three keys and the tones of a piano struck softly in a major chord, lovely, brief, and whole.

Reaching, he thanked with his fingertips her motionless hand, but said:

"When we're married, darling, you won't have a pipe organ. You'll have to tell me then yourself."

She turned and looked at him a long time.

"All right, Jim," she said. "I always will."

As he was bending toward her, something caught her eye obliquely and she remained very still, except for an almost

infinitesimal shadow pulsing near her throat. Down on the main floor just below them where one of the counters caught the light, there was an immense length of gold lamé cloth, bunched on high and draped in falling folds. As Jim watched it, it stirred, ever so slightly. And afar across the store, in shadowy distances of luxury, of fine things, he saw two thin old cleaning women sweeping slowly toward them along parallel aisles. The gold lamé stirred again, shimmering liquid light, star-pointed, and out of it as if draped in this gorgeousness another cleaning woman, even more elderly but sadder, stuck her frowzled head. Jim straightened hurriedly. Softly, softly Anne began to play, a tune delicate and antique. It sounded as if they could dance to it, the shadowy old women among shadows of luxury.

"That was a close call," he said, with the calm eyebrows of cultivated listening.

"Very," Anne said.

Culturally, he said, "It sounds like a dance."

"It is," she said. "It's a mazurka."

He couldn't see if she was laughing, but she added, "You don't have to act, dear. They can't hear us."

"All right," he said, and leaned against the console again.

"And if you look so solemn, listening, they'll think you're a new efficiency expert," she said. "They'll work in terror all night."

He thought how filled with subtle precisions were her hands, which as she talked moved without haste on two of the four keyboards, without the obvious rhythms of piano-playing but filling the dimnesses from high above with a complex and fragile syncopation. "I love you, too, Jim," she said. He thought

her hands would never touch him without his remembering their separate and unhurried vividness.

"It'll be an inexpensive part of town," he said.

One finger rubbed against its working neighbor as if a missed eighth-note had got caught by its barb and had to be quickly flicked loose. "I've always lived in them."

"Not a big house, but with a gate."

"I think a gate will be necessary."

"We won't ever have a lot of money. Not on newspapers. It doesn't work that way."

"I never have had, dear," she said.

Down on the main floor the old women of the night were listening, each in her own way, to the music. One was sweeping more and more slowly, and in the midst of a display of jewels and of silver dishes she stopped to drag the back of her knobbed hand across her mouth, while her eyes stared gently—not with wishes, perhaps, but the memory of wishes. But her friend was sweeping with redoubled briskness, exceedingly matter-of-fact, and she was getting away ahead in her aisle. Her wide broom sent scurrying the dust, the stepped-on cigarette stubs, and the chewing-gum wrappers. The nearest one had moved from the gold lamé to a counter of artificial flowers. Leaning her broom against her shoulder and wiping her hands on her mended skirt, she straightened a sprig or two; her hand hovered above a third, a richer cluster of melting colors, and not quite touching it, was slowly withdrawn. And then she stood just looking at them, her garden of the night. This, no one would take from her, it was perpetually renewed. Imperishable, and more perfect than the realities of youth.

But it might have been mistaken, any guess you might have made about anything they might have been thinking. For, with midnight, the city gives to the old and poor, and to the lonely, the last and most costly possession, an anonymous heart.

Anne finished playing and turned off a series of switches. The organ went dead and the lights clicked dark in diminishing succession. "Jim," she said.

On their way out they passed the brisk sweeper. She did not look at them, but her eyes were the saddest of all.

#### FOURTEEN

*Tuesday night along about nine o'clock* he was waiting around down at police headquarters, on a leisurely story. A woman had shot her husband after supper but he wasn't dead yet and they were letting her sweat in a cell while he died in the city emergency hospital. The jail was on the top floor and the city emergency hospital was on the floor below it. One of the internes had told Jim it would be an hour or so, at least, and he thought that would give him time to run out and see Anne for awhile. They were leaning against filing-cabinets in the little glassed-in office of the hospital and beside them at her desk the night supervisor was writing on some cards under her green-shaded lamp. Without looking up she said, "Go on and get your drink, Jim. Or whatever's worrying you. I'll let you know."

"Thanks, Nell," he said. He picked up a blank card from her desk, wrote Anne's phone number on it, and laid it down again beside her hand. With her fingertips she slid it swiftly around her orderly little stack of work under the light, and raised her eyebrows derisively when she saw it was a number in a residential district. She had dark eyebrows and a sweet mouth that children should have known. "Poor Jim. Poor girl," she said. She was efficient as the starched cap pinned most securely to the back of her head, and for a long time they had had an ironical and sometimes ribald friendship. In fact, late one night several years ago . . . but she wouldn't have anything to do with him at all. She had an invalid husband at home. Jim nodded to the interne and went on out and around to the back corridor. The interne still leaning against a filing-cabinet was lighting another cigarette. The match lit up his young, fiercely misanthropic face, haggard with seriousness. So many internes, in this kind of hospital, tried as fiercely to conceal with cop-like cynicism the repeated dirty human shocks; but they all overdid it and their eyes were still the eyes of boys. And none of them got enough sleep in their white bare dormitory.

About halfway down the back corridor was the man who was dying. They had put him in one of the padded medical cells and stationed a cop to sit beside the wheeled cot. They weren't trying to question him any more because he had talked before they operated. All he had said was already in the morning papers. Jim stood looking down at the man's face. The eyes were closed and the lips were not working except to breathe. But in his throat he kept making little childish sounds like a man dreaming. The cop shook his head with a grave doctor-like air. Then he re-lit

the chewed stub of his cigar. But the face on the cot must have sensed that another presence had entered, because the eyes opened staringly on nothing and the mouth said in a loud awakening foolish voice, "Louise? Louise?"—his wife's name.

Jim took the back elevator down to the second floor, to detective headquarters. The elevator was large and square, to take stretchers and morgue-baskets, and on the way down Jim kept thinking about the kids he had seen in the house where this woman had shot her husband. They had just been taking the woman away when he got there, and after things quieted down he and his photographer had gone on back to the room where the kids were. There were four of them, from two to six-and-a-half years old, and they were all crying and eating ice cream cones that one of the cops had gone out and bought for them. They looked as if their mother had cleaned them up before supper, but their faces were in a mess now with tears and strawberry ice cream. Two cops were standing there with them, waiting for the juvenile officers to come and take them away to the detention home.

When he got out of the elevator on the second floor the photographers were there waiting for them to bring the woman down.

"It'll be an hour yet," Jim said.

The Tribune photographer, Hack O'Hara, was sitting sleepily on the back stairway, four or five steps up, with his camera between his feet. He didn't have anything to worry about because Moore, the photographer who had been with Jim at the house had got good pictures and Jim had gone through the house fast, making a cleanup of what few snapshots and cabinet photos

there were. The Times photographer looked more alert because the Times crew had got to the house too late to get anything except the kids.

"Where you going, Jim?" Hack said. "Let's go get a glass of beer."

Jim shook his head. "I'll be around," he said.

He went past the doors of the pawnshop detail and the bunco squad and through some swinging doors into the big main office of detective headquarters. It was nearly empty; at this hour all the pairs were out on the streets. Three dicks were loafing around one desk beside a window, slow burly men no longer young. They looked around at Jim and one of them said with ponderous play-acting hoarseness, "Hush, boys. Somebody's listening."

"Hi, Steve. Walt," Jim said. "Is Newt boasting about his widows again?"

They all smiled slowly, heavily, with good-will, and Newt with an elaborate inquiring look made the gesture of lifting an imaginary glass to his mouth. As silently Jim nodded but framed the words "Not now" with exaggerated lips. He went on into Homicide.

He found the Times man where he expected him to be, in the office of Cy. Sudermann, the captain of detectives in charge at night.

"Nothing yet," Sudermann said. He sat at his desk looking at Jim. He was stupid and tough but he imagined things. When he was in one of his Dick Tracy spells he wasn't anybody's friend, hardly ever the Tribune's friend, and he was never Jim's friend. Jim had once taken him for a hell of a sleigh-ride, and he

meant to again. Tonight Sudermann was snuggling up to the Times as he always did when Jim was on a story. The Times man was Curtis Kaufman; he was an earnest digger, but it didn't worry Jim tonight. There was nothing to dig on this story. Kaufman's eyeglasses glittered thinly as he sat watching Jim. Gently, Jim gave them a mysterious smile to think about, and strolled away.

He went out through the wide public front hall and down the stairway, his feet making a blithe patter on the stone stairs. He glanced into the pressroom; the police reporters were phoning a traffic story, their voices colliding and echoing on a list of names, ages, and addresses. He went on around the building, again by the back way, through the police assembly room with its aisles of lockers, to the booking office. Behind the steel-barred counter, the cops sitting around smoking and the report clerk among his telephones only looked up in recognition as he went through quickly; he had been there once before this evening and there was no need to stop and talk again. The captain's office door was open. He rapped once and went in. Tom Train looked up over his paper.

"H'ya, Jim?" he said, though they had been sitting around talking half an hour ago.

"I'm going to beat it out of here for awhile," Jim said. "Will you watch it for me?"

"Sure," Tom said. "Where you going to be?"

Jim bent over and wrote Anne's phone number on Tom's desk pad. Tom watched him lazily and when Jim straightened up they remained half-smiling at each other in understanding.



They both knew several things. Tom hated Sudermann: they had even had a fist-fight, years ago, and Sudermann had beaten Tom's face off. This business tonight had been handled well by the uniformed cops, they had got a statement from the woman and part of one from the man and they were taking care of everything when the dicks got there. And then, as always, as soon as everyone got down to headquarters the dicks crowded in and took everything over. One other thing Jim knew: Tom was going to be the next chief of police. Beginning next September. The mayor had told Jim and Jim had told nobody but Brunn, and he had never heard anything to show that anyone else guessed it. But Tom knew, and as they gazed silently at each other their smiles widened imperceptibly. Tom turned his head and looked at the number Jim had written on his pad.

"We'll have a prowler car going out that way in about five minutes," he said.

"I'll take a taxi. Thanks, though," Jim said.

"Well, I'll call you," Tom said.

So Jim took the back elevator again and went clear down, past the motorcycle hole on the side street, clear down to the police garage; and walking through its mediaeval cavernous distances, came out through the big concrete portals marked: AMBULANCES POLICE CARS WATCH OUT NO ADMITTANCE. Standing in the yellow glare of the fog lights at the mouth of the vehicular tunnel under the hill, he flagged down a speeding taxi. When Anne answered her door she was surprised.

The way she kissed him tonight had a different quality. She was calmly possessive, enjoying it thoroughly for perhaps

the first time, and absent-minded. He thought how promptly women, with their obscure and internal physical needs, take The Words—the moon-struck and flyaway words—as the calmly practical foundation for a usable and well-ordered routine, before the first wonder has faded for men from the follies and the poetry of love. As soon as The Words are spoken and answered, women are free to think their own thoughts, nebulous, planning, and delicious with small practical worries.

“Is anything the matter?” she said.

“No, I just had an hour. So I came here,” he said.

“That was nice,” she said.

They walked on into the living room and while he stood uncertainly in the middle of the floor, she sat down on the divan and watched him with limpid eyes.

“Wouldn’t you like a drink?” she asked.

He shook his head. “I don’t think so,” he said.

“Are you tired, poor dear?”

“No. Just dull tonight.”

“Well, I think you may fix me one anyway, please,” she said. “I think I would like one.”

He went to the kitchen and, as long as he was doing it anyway, got down two glasses and fixed himself one too. When he brought them out she smiled and patted the divan beside her. He sat down there, and she said:

“You know, it’s wonderful and I think very rare for people to start out as—as free as we are. I mean, here we are both grown up and alone in the world, except for each other now. This is my own house, and you can come here and see me whenever you want to, and nobody else in the world even needs to know any-

thing at all. It's . . . it's beautiful to me, to have my own house for you."

"Yes," he said.

"Do you like it, Jim?" she asked.

"Yes." He picked up his glass again and said, "I certainly do."

"You don't realize it, of course, but other girls—I have been through a number of engagements with friends of mine—most girls have families to worry about. Just at the wrong time, just as they're planning their own lives. Other people planning and judging for you, criticizing and watching, they give little teas and things, three or four aunts sewing and talking, not at the teas of course but you know what I mean. Even the man's family. Sometimes they're almost the worst trial, for the girl. You've no idea how lucky we are."

"Yes," Jim said.

"Just you and I. And we can be alone, like this, and nobody else to even have to think about. Whatever we do, we do for each other. The only complication we have is my father."

It was all so beautifully clear in her mind. *He* had nothing to worry about, *he* had no other life, for her he existed free and clear. For all these years, just waiting for her. Well, he had told her nothing, except that his mother and father had been dead for years, that he wouldn't write to any of his relatives on a bet, and that he was probably the most thoroughly divorced man in the state. It had made both of them feel good, pensive and lonely last night, an extra feeling of belonging and tenderness when they had sat here with their arms around each other. He supposed it was his fault, every man is something of a heel when he is first

in love. but she didn't need to think that he didn't have any worries. There were more important things than her damned father. He said :

"Well, I have a little girl, you know."

"Oh. Yes. I—Dorothy Crosse told me you had a child. Something about it. But I didn't know which it was."

"Well, it's a little girl," he said.

"Oh, how nice. What's her name?"

"Julie."

"What a pretty name for a little girl. But you never see her, do you? Dorothy Crosse told me that the divorce—"

"Sure, I see her. Once a week. On Friday afternoon. We have a place where we meet."

"So that's w-where . . . that's where you've been on your day off."

"We don't dare tell anybody about it. There'd be hell to pay. My w—the kid's mother would raise hell. They'd probably take it out on her."

"Oh, some women are so hideously selfish ! I love you, Jim."

"I love you, too."

"Where do you go when you meet her? I mean, what do you—"

"We don't go anywhere. We're afraid to be seen together. We just sit on a park bench."

"Oh, how awful !"

"Nothing awful about it. It's a good time. It . . . means a lot."

"But what in the world do you—I mean, I—"

"Oh, we just sit there and talk."

"You mean, about . . . about past times?"

"No. No, we never talk about that. I don't know. We just talk."

"Oh, poor lamb!"

"Who's a poor lamb?"

"Both of you." She turned to him, her lips impulsive, but stopped, and said, "Kiss me, Jim."

He kissed her, but after a moment her lips became absent-minded again with thought. Still holding her, he felt his mind melting a little with the old indiscreet softness of confessional. "Right after the divorce. I got to worrying about her, and I went out and hung around the school one afternoon," he said. "When she came out with all the other kids she saw me."

Anne closed her eyes and put her face in the hollow of his neck. "Poor Jim," she whispered.

He moved his shoulders uncomfortably and she sat up.

"That's why I didn't get the hell out of here long ago," he said brusquely.

She gave him a long and curious look.

"I believe it is," she said.

She kept on looking at him, and he had the feeling that she saw too much, more than he wanted her to see and maybe more than he saw himself. He supposed he would have to get used all over again to a woman loving him enough to see the shrinking nerves and the laziness—the emotional laziness—under the protective toughness or, still worse, under the even more defensive tenderness. But if Anne was seeing clearly for a moment, so was he. If Anne through her feminine clarity about essentials knew at once that his sadness with Julie was in part at least a lazy,

self-deception allowing him to remain comfortably in a do-nothing vagueness, he saw with equal clarity, looking at her, that she was put in a very difficult position. She really had something to worry about now. She could not give him the truth without appearing to resent his relationship with his little daughter.

—Or more baffling to a direct feminine soul, she could see the excuse for his easy-going emotional vagueness (which probably had bothered her), without being able to tell him in so many words that it was unrealistic and not adult. Maybe she even saw the deep congenital roots of it, as had his wife, and disconcerted in her feminine necessity for the definite and the convincing—though hazy feelings of poetry were very nice, too—she did not know how to point out the shortcomings of a husband who must approach everything obliquely, through the imagination. In Anne's eye he saw again the clear and thoughtful look, the feminine resolve: Education.

So she was going to take him in hand, and she clearly saw the way to do it. The silence lasted long enough for him to meditate upon truth between men and women in love. He could approach that, too, obliquely. He reached for his drink and said:

"Would you like to go out some Friday afternoon, and see her?"

It may not have been really a pause. She was taking a sip of her drink, too. She set the glass down carefully and answered:

"No. Not yet." After another moment she said, "It's hard for me to get away on Friday afternoons. Friday afternoons are the hardest of all, to get away."

"Yes, I've known that," he said sympathetically. "That's why I—"

The phone rang. Startled, Anne gathered her feet under her, but Jim said:

"That's for me."

She looked at him wonderingly as he crossed the room. It was Nell's voice in the phone.

"Jim?"

"Yes."

"This is Nell. At the hospital."

"Yes."

"He's gone."

"OK. Thanks," he said.

"—Jim?"

"Yes?"

"Are you having a good time?"

"Probably the kind you like," he said, and hung up.

"What was that?" Anne said.

"It's just a story," he said, with the receiver again in his hand and holding the button down with a thumb.

"What kind of a story?" Anne asked.

"A murder." That sounded too curt so he added reluctantly, "We've been working on it all night."

"Oh, dear—should you be . . . should you be out here having a drink while—"

"Sure. It's all right. I'm covered," he said, and dialled the Tribune. While it was ringing he said, "It's just a routine murder. Everything is organized for it." The switchboard answered and he said, "City desk."

Crosse answered: "City desk." Crosse was on tonight, it was Wooller's night off.

"Kerry. The guy's dead," Jim said. "They'll be bringing the woman down in a few minutes."

"OK," Crosse said, and hung up. He was a sensible deskman. He knew if there had been anything else to say Jim would have said it and called for a reporter.

"Oh," Anne said. "Tell me about it, dear."

He walked over and picked his drink up again. It was about half gone. He drank the rest of it and started vaguely for the kitchen. "It doesn't amount to anything," he mumbled. "It's all junk."

Glancing back from the kitchen doorway he saw that Anne's foot was tapping gently on the floor, and that she had a little firm smile on her lips.

Breaking out the ice-cubes, squinting and measuring from the bottle—after awhile he called :

"Are you ready for another one?"

"No thank you, dear," she said.

He was just pouring in the soda when the phone rang again.

It was Tom Train. "Jim? This guy has died. They're bringing the woman down now."

"OK, Tom," Jim said. "Thanks a lot."

He went back and stirred his drink. When he came out into the living room again, Anne asked :

"Jim, why haven't you told me before? Last night?"

"What do you mean? About this murder?—I told you. It only happened tonight."

"No," Anne said. "I mean about little J-Julie."

Jim winced. "Oh," he said.

"We were having such a nice talk last night," she said.



"It wasn't the time for it," he muttered.

But as he sat down again he was pretty sure that this was her last little preliminary flicker of jealousy about Julie. He could see her mind drawing back from it, even with a sort of shame at thinking of a little girl like that. She would probably never show it any more.

In about half an hour the phone rang again. It was Tom, who said :

"You'd better come on back down. Come to my office."

"All right," Jim said. "Thanks."

Anne went with him to the door. After he had picked up his hat she stood with one finger playing around a buttonhole of his open top-coat. With a sudden breath she crooked her finger through the buttonhole and pulled a little.

"Jim," she said, "I suppose you'll always work nights?"

"I don't know," he said. "Why?"

"You miss the best part of everything. You live in hurry and . . . and darkness," she said. "The world gives its finest gifts in the morning. In the day."

"Yes. I know," Jim said. "Oh, well . . ."

He caught a taxi on the avenue a block away and told the driver: "Take me down to police headquarters." It was an elderly and taciturn taxi-driver, which was a break, but he must have experienced crabbed feelings of drama over the curt words, "police headquarters." He expressed his sense of drama by driving as hell-bent as the old cab would go, clattering right up to a red light and slamming on his brakes with fierce squeals. He careened up to the back entrance of the big gray headquarters

building, threw open the taxi door and croaked, "OK, bud," but Jim had to stop and explain to him what a newspaper taxi slip was. It took some time, and the old cuss was sourly disillusioned about something he had silently been building up in his mind.

In the booking office there were two more old men they had brought in drunk. They both stood on the littered floor in front of the steel-barred counter with their arms half-raised while the patrol-wagon cops went through their pockets and dumped their poor belongings on the counter. The cop behind the counter who was booking them pawed through the two little piles of junk, listing one watch and the little money there was. One of the old men stood staring at nothing with the eyes of the lost, but the other one was teetering jovially and kidding the cops in a thick incoherent voice. One of the patrolmen smiled slightly and said, "OK, dad. Turn around now and stand there." In a minute they would be given back their cigarettes and matches and taken upstairs and shoved into the drunk tank. A sergeant came around from behind the counter and roughly took hold of their hands, looking at the palms. If they were calloused, they were working-stiffs and would be treated better.

Tom Train was still sitting at his desk, but he got up when Jim came into the office. The gold braid on his cuffs did not glisten under the green-shaded light; it was tarnished by the weather and grime of city nights.

"I'm going out for awhile," he said. He stood looking at Jim, and with one hand slowly pulled open the upper right-hand drawer of his desk, but only an inch or two.

"All right. I think I'll just sit around here until you get back," Jim said.

Tom nodded and went on out. He pulled the door to behind him and Jim heard the safety latch click. In the drawer were a couple of sheets of thin pebbled paper clipped together. They were carbon copies and on the top of the first sheet had been typed: *For Headquarters Captain Commanding*. So it hadn't taken Cy Sudermann long to break the woman down.

Jim glanced through the two pages and called the city desk. "Here's the woman's confession," he said.

"All right," Crosse said, and Jim heard him call over his shoulder, "Bob, take Kerry."

After a couple of switchboard clicks, Richter came on the phone and said, "OK, Jim. What have you got?"

"I better dictate," Jim said.

"Right. Just a minute till I get the earphones on," Richter said.

Steadily, as fast as Richter could take it, Jim dictated a new lead, not using Cy Sudermann's name. That could be buried toward the tail of the story. Under Tom Train's desk light, the typed confession lay neat and pallid. In the police stenographer-clerk's prim typing it began:

I do not know what come over me. I got him his supper. I could not stand to think no more. I could not stand to look at the sight of his face while he was eating because I could think what his face was when he was with those others. Q. Women? A. If I knew their names I would not be here yet. I washed up the dishes. The time is gone when I died every day from thinking. I do not care if I die now. I took off my apron and sent the chil-

dren out to play. They did not want to go because it was dark outside but I sent them anyway . . .

Phoning the cleanup of the routine story, Jim had the old weary feeling for the lost, the drab, those so sorely beset without the chance to rest a little. For so many, for nearly all, it was the colorless glare of everyday and the monotony of toil not back-breaking to make bitterness, but everlasting to make dullness; and the curse of dreams without enough to dream on. The imagination—the imagination that could create like a faery gift the illusion of something different, the illusion, the feathery colors, of happiness; the imagination that could turn and destroy like a gnawing animal.

While he dictated he thought once about the kids eating ice cream cones. While he had been there another cop had come in bringing four more ice cream cones from the corner drug store.

## F I F T E E N

*When he telephoned Anne Wednesday*  
night she said in a queer pinched voice:

"Father's here."

He knew her telephone was in the living room, so she couldn't talk much. They had a date for a late supper there, their

first bit of housekeeping together, something they probably always would have remembered.

"Do you want me to come out?" he asked.

"I think so," she said. "Please."

"All right. I was just leaving. I've got my hat on. Anything you want me to bring?"

"No," she said.

He took a taxi from the stand on the corner and with his feet propped up on the folding jump-seat, smoked a cigarette without curiosity. He had been a newspaperman too long and had watched too many men of all kinds, who with the exceptions of criminals, actors, policemen and certain types of preachers, hardly ever looked as you might in advance have expected. With a small jolt of morality it recurred to him that Anne's father would be considered a criminal; but he only grinned.

Anne met him at the door of her apartment. She did not kiss him; dimly she offered him her hand.

The old boy was standing at the far end of the apartment, his back toward them, looking out the windows with his hands in the pockets of his tweed sports jacket. He turned around deliberately as they came into the room. Anne swallowed.

"Father, this is Mr. Kerry."

"Glad to know you, son," he said.

He was a man of moderate proportions. His hair was gray.

They stood around, Jim feeling a little awkward, until finally old Vollard said, "How about a drink? Have you got anything here, Annie?"

"Oh yes—in the kitchen. I'll get it."

"I'll mix them out there. Don't bother," Vollard said.

"It's in the top cupboard on the right," Anne said. "And the glasses are—"

"I'll find everything," Vollard said.

He went into the kitchen. They could hear him opening cupboards, and after awhile running hot water on a tray of ice-cubes. He made more noise than he needed to, clinking glasses around, setting things down with elaborate thumps, humming intently some sort of bass tune to himself; and he took lots of time, giving them plenty of margin to say to each other whatever they wanted.

"What's the matter—is he broke?" Jim said.

Anne nodded.

"I'll take him back downtown with me," Jim said. "I'll get him a room in my hotel."

He hesitated, and then didn't say anything else. Anne had already given the old boy some money—you could tell.

When Vollard came in carrying a tray of highballs the three of them just stood around again; but this time taking decorous selfconscious sips as at a party which nobody was enjoying, until Anne suddenly walked across the room and sat down on the divan.

The small talk would have stopped if there had been any.

"Look," Jim said. "Won't you let me put you up at my hotel for your visit. It's downtown and a convenient place, nothing grand, but—uh, convenient."

"All right, son," Vollard said.

If he was at all amused he hid it behind the rim of his glass. Then he stood sloshing the ice around and around, gently.

"My, this drink tastes good," Anne said. She looked at her glass as if startled to be reminded of it, and took another sip.

Her father sloshed the ice in his glass around and around.

"How did it go at the office today, Jim?" Anne asked.

"What?—Oh, it's always about the same," Jim said. "Every day is about the same."

"Jim is a newspaperman," Anne told her father.

"Ah," Vollard said.

"It must seem strange to Father to see real weather again. I mean, cold and rainy and all," Anne said, trying hard to make conversation.

Her father smiled benignly.

"Father's just come from Yucatan," Anne explained.

"Oh," Jim said. "That must be quite a trip."

"Yes, isn't it?" Anne said.

"Do you find the city much changed?" Jim asked.

"No," Vollard said.

All their glasses were about half empty, and they all three drank at once. The ice-cubes bumped against Jim's lip, and down the barrel of his glass he looked at the old boy's profile. Vollard was taking a good calm drink, but some creases around his eyes had deepened.

"Well," Jim said, "I guess it's about time good little girls were in bed. When they have to get up so early."

"Oh, but don't go," Anne said. "—Wouldn't you like some supper—either of you?"

"Too late for a lot of fuss," Jim replied.

"Oh, heavens, it's no trouble at all," Anne said. "I'll just—"

Jim shook his head. "We can grab a bite downtown if your father's hungry."

"I'm not," Vollard said.

They all drank at once again, and that just about emptied their glasses.

"Well—er, shall we go?" Jim asked.

"Oh dear, it seems so early," Anne said.

"Well, I think . . . get your father settled," Jim said. "He's probably pretty tired, from such a long trip."

"But wouldn't either of you like another drink?" Anne said. "It would only take a—"

"I kind of expect we ought to get down to the hotel and pick out a good room before it gets late," Jim said. "I should have called and reserved one."

"I'm ready, son," Vollard said.

They all went toward the door and in the little hallway Vollard picked up his grip. That was all there was—just one grip. From a chair he took a soft gray crush hat and put it on. He had no overcoat.

Anne shook hands with Jim again. "Well, goodnight," she said in a little voice.

"Goodnight, honey," her father said. Gravely he kissed her forehead.

That hat Vollard had on. It looked expensive, it looked as if he had bought it in Yucatan. It looked operatic. They waited on the curb for a taxi to cruise by.

On the way downtown, sitting side by side with his grip at their feet, they didn't try to talk very much. Jim said something about the Veterans' Fountain when they passed it, not quite



pointing it out as a civic pride, but nearly as lamely as that. Vollard lit a cigarette.

"I used to be a lawyer here," he said.

"Oh, of course—I think Anne mentioned it."

Vollard dribbled a little smoke through his nostrils. "Did she?"

Jim avoided saying anything else about Anne because he had no way of knowing how much she had told her father. But then he thought that even if Anne had told him they were going to be married, Vollard would think a prospective-father-in-law scene as distasteful as he himself would. When the taxi slid alongside the curb in front of the hotel, Jim said, "Let's have a drink."

"Fine," Vollard said.

"There's a little place just down the street."

"There's always a little place just down the street. Whatever city or country you happen to be in. They've always been there," Vollard said, "and while the respectable wouldn't admit it, they're the outposts of the One World they've begun to talk so much about lately."

"Something in that," Jim said.

"Sure. Men are more brothers when they meet as sinners in a bar or a *cantina* or a pub than they ever will be when they meet as statesmen in a forum." Vollard seemed suddenly willing to please. But it was more than that, he wasn't particularly thinking of Jim. It was as if with an affable sigh he became himself, a figure breezy and competent walking down a street in any out-of-the-way city of the world. For some reason or other, Jim could see him in a white tropical suit and Panama hat walking

into an arcade in some city like Tampico or Havana or Caracas, with the light swing of his steps, as he was walking now into this side-street bar from a gritty pavement. He walked ahead of Jim toward the back of the place, slid his grip under a table, and sat down.

"Rye highballs?" he said, and tossed a folded five-dollar bill across toward the middle of the table.

Jim nodded. "But it was I who asked you to come in here," he said.

"Well, we'll be here for a while," Vollard said, "and I've always liked the principle of the older man buying first."

It was sitting there, waiting for their drinks, that Jim for the first time really noticed old Vollard's eyes. They were rather small, they looked as if they could be pin-pointed with intensity, but they were of so strange a tawny brown that in a strong light they gave the illusion of being yellow—that is, eyes of mostly a clear yellow, though with green flecks and brown at the edges of the iris; but not enough flecks or enough color at all, even yellow, to keep them from looking like the eyes of a high wild goat gazing with remote delicacy at enormous cool distances.

"Son," he said, "has it ever occurred to you the money to be made out of a good turquoise mine?"

"Well, I guess I never thought about it," Jim said.

"Ah. I didn't think you had," Vollard said. "Now, I've been making a study of—" The waiter put their drinks in front of them and dumped the change on the table. Vollard and Jim lifted their glasses slightly toward each other, and drank.

"Now, son, I've gone into it pretty thoroughly," Vollard said. "Look. There have been great social changes in our time.

We are living through a social revolution. Just look around you—but hell, I don't have to tell you. You're an experienced man.

"But I'll give you an example. A fellow delivering coal outside the store where I bought these socks." Vollard stretched out a leg and pulled up a little the cuffs of his trousers. It was an earnest, folksy gesture and his voice was folksy, too. The socks were admitted as exhibits. "Now this man was grimy with toil and sweat, he was streaked with coal-dust. He was conducting coal down a chute into a hole in the sidewalk. No money to speak of, no prospects—why, when I was a young man, he would have been among the completely submerged. Hopeless, drab, a beaten soul, surly and downcast of eye.

"Yet in the course of our conversation, he said to me that he and his wife were giving a little dinner-party that night. That was his phrase: 'My wife and I are giving a little dinner-party tonight.' He said it with casual distinction, like a man in an advertisement, but very unlike the hero in a proletarian novel. And in passing, it occurs to me that there is where our proletarian novelists are getting left behind.

"But that man exemplified," he said, returning sternly to business, "a wonderful thing that is happening in our great American life. It is universal. It is a remarkable thing." With a deep glance he included Jim, sitting with his rye, in this moral, high-minded approach to whatever he was getting at.

Jim had known too many lawyers to be astonished at the mixture of righteous professional corn and involuntary personal speculation. He had merely to look edified, and Vollard went on:

"As a consequence, thousands of women are wearing jewelry who never wore it before—hundreds of thousands. The clothing trades have met this vast new market with medium-priced and beautiful frocks. But how many can afford emeralds? Diamonds are still denied to the poor. And many women prefer fewer but genuine jewels to the gewgaws of so-called costume jewelry which flood the counters of the nation. What is the answer? The answer lies in the great field of the semi-precious stones.

"And none can be more desirable than the turquoise. With its ineffable blues, its shades of green and its patterns—it blends with every costume. I'll show you."

Stooping, he dragged out his grip and opened it.

Automatically, he had started to work on Jim.

Inside the grip, on top, were two or three soiled shirts, a thick bundle of frayed papers and worn envelopes held with a rubber band, a pint bottle half-full of whisky. From somewhere at the bottom of the grip Vollard began pulling up large chunks of turquoise and laying them one by one, with impressive silence, upon the table.

"Rye highballs," he said to the waiter. Jim put down some money. ". . . All right, son, if you insist.—But turquoise has more than its mere gorgeous colors, which you can see here in all its stages, from matrix as it comes from the mine, to the final polished stone. Turquoise is rich in history. It's very name is thought to be derived from Turkey, where it was anciently found. It is thought to be the precious *callais* mentioned by Pliny. The legends of Inca and Maya are full of it. Today the world's greatest supply is found in the American southwest. It

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comes from the earth of those dry mountains, and it is the color of the sky.

"I can see that you are a man who knows how to appreciate beautiful and historic objects."

He took a hasty drink, and his voice sank to a murmur, as he hitched his chair closer and glanced over one shoulder.

"For these, which you can hold in your hand, are history incarnate. I know the location of the mine they came from. They were taken from that mine by Indian slaves in ancient days. I am one of two people alive today who can take you to a hill, and point, and say, 'There is that great, that rich lost place, of which old Indians still speak the legend.'

"Son, there is thirty feet of water over the forgotten portal of that lost mine."

Twirling his glass around, and then suddenly pushing it away untasted, he dropped a good part of his lawyer-eloquence; his voice became brisker, but at the same time much more confidential:

"Thirty feet of water. Illegal water."

He leaned back, as if to view the effect upon Jim's face. Feeling more than a trace of the desired hypnosis, Jim blinked alertly. Vollard gave several slow nods, his mouth becoming stern. Coming forward very close across the table, he measured his words with a tapping forefinger:

"It is a monumental injustice."

He sat there distinguished and ruined. But indomitable. Jim murmured something about it being a lot of water, all right.

"By God, son," Vollard said, "it is good that we can talk as equals, as men of experience. It is a heartening thing. And,

of course, as a friend of the family . . . of my little Anne . . .” This he left delicately in the air, and continued:

“I have sworn to alleviate this hellish wrong for the sake of the sweetest, the bravest little woman it has ever been my privilege . . .” he broke off, and sat frowning at his folded hands upon the table.

“Her name is Lupita Pacheco,” he said. “She at present resides in Mexico City. This beautiful and talented girl, left early a widow, lives in straitened circumstances, sometimes I fear near actual want, because deprived of her lawful inheritance.

“By thirty feet of illegal water.”

He lit a cigarette, and talking against its curling smoke, got down to business.

“Here are the details. The ancient mine from which by God, son, these specimens of mineral came, is situated near the present site of a small but prosperous—very prosperous—city in the state of New Mexico.

“This municipality built, some years ago, a little dam out in the hills. Which backed up the waters of a creek, creating an artificial lake. It is the sole source of the city’s water supply.

“Unfortunately, it backed the water right up over where our turquoise mine is.”

“Ah,” Jim said.

“You may well say it. . . . Now, the condemnation proceedings were all in due order. A routine matter, and all in due order.

“BUT,” Vollard said.

Carefully with the side of his hand he wiped some cigarette ashes from the table.

"In the case of one parcel of land, so soon to be submerged, the condemnation proceedings were not directed against the legal owners," he said. "Deceived perhaps by the apparent routine nature of the matter, they proceeded against and by agreement with persons who were not, in fact, the owners of this land at all."

"Oh boy," Jim said.

"Exactly.

"This entire area was once part of an ancient Spanish land-grant. The grant was subsequently broken up, and various portions of the lands have passed through several ownerships. As a matter of fact," Vollard explained, "the land was and is considered to be of low value.

"Because the location of the legendary turquoise mine was lost in the mists of history."

He drank.

"That is, it was lost to the public knowledge.

"However, all the transfers of title to the various properties were in legal order, except one. That one exception occurs early in the history of this especial parcel of land of which I speak. A search revealed to me a glaring flaw, son—an invalidating flaw—in the second transfer of title to this parcel of land, now under water. And as you remarked, thirty feet is a lot of water, especially if put there by a municipality.

"I was appalled to discover that thus thrown wide open to the most vicious litigation was the location of that historic mine of jewels."

He became sadly tolerant.

"The attorneys for the municipality were understandably

lax. The flaw in the second transfer, ninety years ago, is there for any legal mind to discover by careful search. It is possible that they did discover it, and assumed that there were no living heirs to that long-gone owner, to what was considered virtually wasteland.

"I so assumed myself.

"It was only in the course of further inquiries in Mexico City that I learned that such an heir does in fact live."

His eyes became piercing.

"It is Lupita Pacheco," he said.

He made no gesture. He seemed deep in thought.

Finally, he said:

"I should deplore litigation.

"But our case is impregnable. Not even a deep-sea diver could prove or disprove anything by re-finding or not re-finding the lost portal of the mine, or mining or not mining a few turquoises.

"And when we won, you cannot fence off and pump dry a section of the lake-floor, so as to return to its legal owner that land in its original condition.

"Now, nothing but removal of that otherwise legal dam, the draining of that otherwise legal lake, can restore to Lupita Pacheco her land—her turquoise mine. And that would deprive an entire municipality of its sole water supply.

"Nonetheless, I fear we may have to threaten to seek relief in the courts by means of injunction proceedings. So vast is the treasure at stake.

"There remains, son, the possibility of a reasonable, fair-minded settlement. Especially if we should be so fortunate as to



stampede the proprietor of the local newspaper—not a very smart cookie—into a ‘Save Our City’ campaign.

“The public uproar, of course, is bound to be considerable. It is upon that, perhaps, that I base my prediction of an equitable settlement.

“It has been done before, in similar cases of injustice.

“It’s airtight, son, it’s airtight.”

“My God,” Jim said.

The old boy leaned back in his chair with his glass in his hand. His sports jacket, his gray shirt with a button-down soft collar and blue bow tie, careless and loosely-slanting.

Jim had a newspaperman’s working knowledge of law, insufficient for this though he was pretty sure what an eventual court’s decision would be, for the public good if for no other reason. But he was *quite* sure of where Vollard really intended to get money—sucker money.

“So you’ve come here to get financing,” Jim said.

“Why, yes. Lupita—son, if you think you’ve ever seen a passionately beautiful gazelle, wait until you’ve seen her—but she hasn’t a *peso* to bless herself with. And I, because of various investments, am not at the present time in a position to undertake alone a . . .” He stopped, and looked long at Jim.

Then suddenly realizing Jim had no money, he collapsed, a sighing collapse.

“Well, son . . . oh, well,” he said.

Sadly he began packing his chunks of turquoise away again. While he was bent over the grip, all at once the bent back of an old man, Jim signalled the waiter.

They drank their nightcaps in silence. Once Vollard’s eyes

deepened with amused wrinkles around them as he looked at Jim. And Jim was thinking, this man was the damned, the awful, always pitiful damned—he had the childlike quality of hope, of wrong belief. He had the remembrance of wonder.

## SIXTEEN

*Friday afternoon Jim sat with his feet* propped up against a window-sill in his hotel room, waiting for time to go meet Julie. He had a magazine on his lap, and once in awhile he turned a page. But he didn't see anything he wanted to read. His phone had been ringing, at regular intervals, ever since he came back from breakfast, around one o'clock. He hadn't answered. Somebody had knocked on his door. He hadn't moved. Another highly-colored page whispered between his hands. He sat looking out between the sooty lace curtains at the streaked and dirty buildings and the gray roofs of the city.

Last night on a late story he had stood in a silent place—silent except for one sound—where hard and cynical men stared stonily straight ahead because no man dared catch another's eye. And after awhile from a drug-store telephone booth shaken stealthily by the big freights, he had phoned in a story about a child. A little boy, who bewildered by shining steel stretching into infinity, had run stumbling the wrong way under a great and blinding light while trying to carry his father's lunch to

him across the switch-yards. He had died holding his father's big grease-blackened hand, and making little jokes because his father couldn't make any more for him.

Crosse had done a beautiful job on the story—better than if he had been there, and seen it. The story was worth only about four inches, but Crosse had written of the shining steel, the merciless steel of the world, and of the clustered signal lights which burned like strange-colored constellations in the distances of the night beyond the world. Crosse was a poet, though he would have laughed.

Jim turned another page, but he kept hearing that one sound. The sound of a man trying not to cry before other men.

Jim laid the magazine down carefully and got up and went into the bathroom. He poured a drink into the spattered glass which stood in a rack there. Enclosed by the four grimy walls he drank it. It tasted chemical, it tasted like the reeking world. It tasted like all the chemicals men have used to build a world against the night—against the night and against themselves. He put the glass back and got his hat and overcoat and went out, on his way to see Julie.

Down the corridor toward the elevator he saw Vollard's door standing open. The old boy was in there, in front of the mirror, tying his tie.

"Hello, son. I thought you'd be looking in," he said. "Come on and close the door."

He had a very pale glass of whisky and water standing on the bureau, and with happiness he was fixing himself up like a college boy for a heavy date. His shirt was tan, and the bow tie had bright brown leaves on a clear yellow.

"Have a drink," he invited, motioning sidewise with his head.

"No thanks. I just had one," Jim said.

Vollard hummed a little under his breath, getting his tie just right with delicate touches and pulls between his fingers. It sounded like a bit of opera he was humming, it had the pathos of the artificially passionate, it sounded as if all the violins would be boiling and the guy with the cymbals just ready to give out with a shimmer.

Vollard turned away and lit a cigarette.

"I have a date," he said. "With a Mrs. Candish. Do you know her? Mrs. Mabel Candish."

"No," Jim said.

"Ah, too bad," Vollard said. "All dew and fire, Mrs. Candish."

He sipped his drink and squared his shoulders. He unfolded a fresh handkerchief and from a small bottle touched it with cologne.

The phone rang, and without haste he walked across the room and answered it.

"Oh—*Monica*," he said richly. "Now this is amazing. I was just sitting here, feeling lonesome and thinking about you. . . ."

Jim started to go out. Vollard waved good-bye to him, sat down on the edge of the bed and bent caressingly over the phone.

Downstairs, Jim had got as far as the cigar counter when he saw the little cross-eyed copy boy, probably the most cross-eyed boy in the world. He was sitting very straight in a chair, impressed by the decayed commercial elegance, once like a

furniture-store window, of this third-rate lobby. He was sitting where he could watch the elevator door, but at the moment his gazes, with indirect precocity, were following a tall blonde who with a rhythmically floating scroll of hair was walking toward the street entrance. As Jim stopped, the kid saw him; he came dodging across the lobby and then slouched toughly beside the cigar counter.

"Mr. Brunn he wants to see you, Mr. Kerry," he said, thrusting his face forward, biting off the words the way hot-shot reporters do in B pictures. His cigarette nearly dropped from his lips but he caught it and began to puff furiously, with a dreadful intent leer.

"Beat it, Sherwood. It's my day off," Jim said.

The cigar clerk shoved a couple of packages of cigarettes across the counter, breathing heavily.

"Shake for them, Mr. Kerry?" he said.

"No. Not today," Jim said. He put a half-dollar down. The cigar clerk prided himself upon his knowledge of what he called, in a thick murmur, sporting life. He was a fat man, full of hints. Jim turned partly away. "Tell Brunn you can't find me, Sherwood. By the time you get there it'll be true."

"Nuts. He's been after the operators all day, ringing your hotel here. It's important," Sherwood said.

"How do you figure the seventh at Santa Anita today?" With a secret motion the cigar clerk got a printed pad out of a drawer beside his belly. "Now, I can tell you that a couple bucks on—"

"No. Not today." Jim put the cigarettes in his overcoat pocket and stood waiting for his change.

In the strange ventriloquism of living a B picture, Sherwood gnarred, "It's a whale of a story! It's breaking!" Jim watched him meditatively. The pearl-gray hat with a snap brim, the poor dark pinched face—

"I can't go back. Mr. Brunn he assigned me to find you," Sherwood said plaintively. "He told me not to come back without finding you.—Here's a letter, Mr. Kerry. I found it in your box at the office." He looked hopefully at Jim, the nearest he could with his insecure little black button eyes. "Please, Mr. Kerry. Now can I go tell Mr. Brunn?"

"Wait. I wasn't in my room for a long time, so you're covered. I was out eating, in a secluded bistro that even the operators don't know about." Jim had an odd deprecatory feeling, to mention so fine a breakfast-lunch as he had had, because Sherwood's face looked as if he had never seen enough of the right kinds of things to eat. He knew the kid's lunch, late at night, was coffee and doughnuts at the lunch-counter in the alley behind the Tribune building: he had seen him squinting ardently over his mug. "Listen, kid, you can't find me, but you can go and sit around somewhere for awhile and call the city desk every fifteen minutes. Very alertly." Jim looked at the letter. It was a bill, from a clothing store. "How much did Brunn give you to find me?"

"Two bits," Sherwood said. "You know Mr. Brunn."

"Of old," Jim said. He reached under his overcoat and got a dollar out of his pocket. "You didn't see me here, Sherwood. I've got a date."

"I gotcha!" Sherwood hissed. Nodding significantly, he

whirled and went scurrying among the people in the lobby toward the front doors.

"New doll moved in here couple days ago," the cigar clerk said. He wet a fingertip and pretended to slick down one of his eyebrows, with his lips pursed into a circle. "She tells me she's from Omaha, and she is asking her way around here. Something nice to meet for a day off, Mr. Kerry."

"Sure, sometime," Jim said. "Thanks." He picked up his change and went out, into the late afternoon crowds along the street. He was tired of people of the night. He was glad he was going to see Julie, for hers was a morning spirit.

## SEVENTEEN

*Today he was not very late. She had been* waiting only a while when she saw his taxi coming; and then on the windy curb he was bending down to her, holding out his hand and saying, with laughter only in his voice, "Hello, Miss Kerry." She thought he looked tired; it was the first time she had ever noticed whether anyone she knew looked tired, or older; and for a moment she thought dimly of change, and the thought turned into wonder at what it was like to be grown up. It was her first glimpse of this sadness, and she was not ready for it; it was a shadow not there when she tried to look at it straight.

Walking slowly beside him to their bench she watched her feet going seriously one before the other, and the worn hem of her coat moving as first one knee and then the other bumped it forward. But she said :

"Well, it's been quite a week, hasn't it? You've had some good stories."

"Oh . . ." he said vaguely, "let's don't talk shop, honey. Not today."

She walked proudly. Nothing had ever made her feel more included.

"All right, Jim," she said. She had been going to tell him that the week had been long for her, and a dismal one. She would have liked to let him know how sometimes she needed him, the strong and gentle sound of his voice ; but this was better. Besides, now it was all right, now that their two hours had finally come. She sat with dignity on the bench, and arranged her cotton skirt.

This was a day of spring and changing distant gleams, so that some places far away across the smoky valley and the city were clearer to see than places nearer. The dull roar of business swelled toward them for a moment : a flaw of wind. Jim seemed absent-minded, she thought. But that was often a sign that the story would be a good one. He groped in his overcoat pocket, and brought out a package of cigarettes. Looking at it he gave an odd blink, and then glanced quickly at her. So she guessed he had forgotten to bring any candy today.

She started to touch his hand and say she wasn't hungry, but it would somehow have been wrong. It was the first time he had ever forgotten anything. So she touched his hand and smiled.



Some people passed, a man and woman, close behind them, but did not stop. The footsteps went on, and the murmured voices, and she was alone with Jim. From their bench they looked out across the smoke and the hazy buildings and the deceits of windy light. His arm lay strangely heavy across her shoulders.

"Tell me a story, Jim," she said softly.

He moved with a long breath, and took his arm away to light a cigarette. The flame of the match caused sad daylight shadows around his eyes, but when he blew it out he was watching her sidewise with their secret laughter. She wondered what he would ever do without her. She worried about him so.

"All right," he said. He dropped the match, fumbled with his cigarette for a moment and then drew her closer, his remembering arm once more making a child more comfortable.

"But not about . . . any of the things we usually have in mind," he said. "Be very still for a minute, honey, and listen to the city. Do you hear?—it's hoarse and slattern, with diamonds and dirt, it knows too much and . . .

"The city, the dusty godmother, gives her fine and practical gifts in the morning, in the day. At night she turns into a witch—for hers is the magic of changing herself—and her gifts of the night are smaller and more terrible." The spring twilight, and his voice : slow, stopping to think for a word.

"Once upon a time," he said, "there was a little girl who walked in the morning . . ."

And it was beautiful for them again.

*When she kissed him good-bye at the corner* where they always left each other, she squeezed very hard with her arms around his neck, and then touched his face with her fingertips. They were not sticky today. But as she walked on up the avenue, it was with an obscurely troubled heart.

At her own corner she turned and looked back. It was too far to see, even if he still had been there, but through the hurrying crowds of people she looked back at the place where she had left him. After the lights and traffic of the avenue, the residential street was dark and silent; but she walked slower and slower. Once, in the middle of a block, she stopped to swing on a gate, looking at the bright-shaded windows of a house, a used-looking house with big trees around it. She knew the children who lived there, there were five of them and lots of times on Saturday afternoons their father and mother would be playing with them in the yard, everyone breathless and glowing in the face and calling back and forth. She had been there, and they had been so nice to her, almost as if she had been one of them. She sighed, and got down off the gate, and walked on toward home.

Her mother had on a dark gold dress cut low at the breast and shoulders and she was standing still and decorative in the middle of the cool perfect living room when Julie came in. But she could remember her mother with rumpled hair. She supposed Mr. Gilson was upstairs getting dressed. She knew that they were going out to dinner with friends tonight. He never made

any noise around the house, it was hard to know if he was there—not as she remembered Jim being at home. Her mother said :

“Oh. Katie will give you your supper when you’re cleaned up. It’s a lovely supper, darling.”

Julie felt perspiry and small and grubby. But perfectly she said, “Thank you, Mother.”

And her mother looked at her unexpectedly, a long, examining look, suddenly seeing. And said in a curiously flat tired voice :

“Your coat is positively shabby. I think I must take you downtown for a new one. Some time soon.”

Julie went on upstairs to her room. She heard them going out, she heard the car starting, and she stood in front of the long mirror in the bathroom door, looking at her coat.

## N I N E T E E N

*The next day was Saturday, and around* ten o’clock when she heard the vacuum cleaner going in the house she went to the trash can to find the morning paper. Katie had picked it up, all rumped, from beside Mr. Gilson’s plate when she cleared the breakfast table. Her mother never seemed interested in the paper any more, but Katie had probably read it in the kitchen, and about an hour later Julie heard her carrying the garbage out. Jim wouldn’t have an important story in it today because yesterday he had been off ; but Julie knew that sometimes

a feature story would be held for days before it was used, and there was always that chance on a Saturday morning. She found the paper almost on top, only slightly soiled; and she leaned against the side of the garage, out of sight of the kitchen windows.

She looked clear through to the want ads at the back of the second section, but there wasn't anything of Jim's, at least nothing with his by-line on it. She had been hearing the soggy clank of garbage cans in other back yards and now, peering over the low neatly square hedge, she saw her friend, Mr. Trigg, approaching along the alley with his assistant, George. Behind them as they walked, there rumbled with august slowness the vast gray truck of their municipal dignity. Mr. Trigg and his assistant, George, wore folded gunnysacks on their shoulders. They were both thin, sad men, not young. Mr. Trigg had a moustache. It must have been gray.

They all said good morning, while the truck drew up and stopped, pulsing restfully. There was a young man of great hauteur who drove the truck, sitting upon high in the cab. He smoked cigarettes, living his own emotional life with hauntingly slanted eyebrows, and Julie had hardly ever heard him say anything. But Mr. Trigg, taking off the top of their garbage can, poked inside with a scholarly forefinger.

"I see you folks went out to dinner last night," he said conversationally.

"Well, they did, but I stayed home," Julie said. "Katie and I."

"Friday's paper's on top of the last dinner leavings," Mr. Trigg said.

"That's because Katie and I had chicken hash," Julie said.  
"We ate it all."

"Aha," Mr. Trigg said, relieved.

"So you were practically right," Julie said.

Mr. Trigg nodded. "I sometimes think I know folks, my clients, better'n their best friends," he said. "Yes, there's food for thought . . . Down the line where Mr. Bletcher lives, a single man he is, there've been plenty of goings-on this week. Now, if you was my married daughter, I could tell you. You'd be surprised."

George clucked, with downcast eyes.

"People!" Mr. Trigg said with gentle bitterness.

"I'll just, now, take a-holt of this," George said, his big veined hands tilting the garbage can.

"No, George, it's getting time for a smoke," Mr. Trigg said. They wiped their hands carefully on their trousers and then reached under their canvas aprons, George for a bent package of cigarettes and Mr. Trigg for a half-burned cigar.

"Not," Mr. Trigg said through smoke like that of a straw tick burned in the back yard of a poor-house, "not that I take a moral view. I have had too many sorrows of my own. In my life."

"Yup, yup," George said, wagging his head sadly and his hand synchronizing to put the cigarette in his mouth. "Yup," George said. "Goddlemighty."

With a head slightly inclined, Mr. Trigg accepted this tribute to the greatness of his crucifixions.

"But I won't go into that, at this time," Mr. Trigg said.  
"I have learned to live for others."

Somehow, somehow Julie knew what he meant.

"But," Mr. Trigg said, "the things you see in my profession!"

"Glock," George said, choking modestly on his cigarette.

"Now, the mayor, he lives down the alley here, a couple blocks," Mr. Trigg said.

Hastily, George reached again for the garbage can.

"And other prominent citizens," Mr. Trigg muttered obscurely. "George, be still."

"Yup, yup," George said, and with the fierceness of the timid smoked his cigarette.

"The things we find in our garbage cans," Mr. Trigg said. "Things their friends don't know anything about. Things maybe husbands and wives don't know about each other."

George reached secretly and with a big anxious hand plucked Mr. Trigg's sleeve.

"My God," Mr. Trigg said austerely, "who do they think takes up the garbage—a ghost?"

"Hey, you guys," the young man in the truck said.

"Now, the mayor's wife," Mr. Trigg went on, "we've discussed, George and me, why she should have a fringe of sleigh-bells around the bottom of a foundation garment."

That seemed astonishing, but not to George. As a man of the world, he flicked his cigarette with his little finger, causing some ash to fall.

"Found a major general's coat one time, but we won't go into the circumstances inside that garbage can," Mr. Trigg said. "Another time we found a prominent banker asleep. Over on the other side of town."

"Wasn't that he was asleep that aroused comment," George said.

"No, it was all his clothes folded up so neat and exact," Mr. Trigg said.

Standing there with her hands in her pockets, Julie was nonchalant with pride at being included in this talk of the great world. When you're nine, any information about it is valuable.

"The things we find regular in some of the richest garbage cans in this city is maybe something for the psychology experts out at the university, or for God to understand, not for me to be telling you," Mr. Trigg said.

Julie nodded, but was silent. She had noticed that if you said anything during a grown-up conversation, grownups were apt to look at you suddenly and stop talking.

"One time found a . . ." Mr. Trigg said, and changed his mind. "Maybe it's the scavengers of the world, us, and laundrymen, and undertakers, who really know what important people . . . It's the garbage of the poor that keeps us sane," Mr. Trigg said.

"Yock, yock," George said, earnestly looking sane.

"It's that part of our route that makes me feel I'm most of use," Mr. Trigg said. "I mean, along the poor alleys.

"For instance, I've been worried about our Mrs. Anders' health. Too many medicine bottles. But always a cheerful word. Because she has to work so hard. Taking in plain sewing.

"And Mrs. Odrup. A woman with two boys. I wish I was in a position to advise her how to feed them. All potato peelings and oatmeal boxes—never a good steak bone, and never any orange rinds. I know they're hard to afford, I know because I

brought up a family of my own. I wish there was something we could do.

"Well," Mr. Trigg said, and dropped his cigar butt into the Gilsons' garbage can. "Let's give it a heave, George. Watch it, it's heavy."

Staggering a little, two elderly tired men, they carried it to the truck and dumped it into the suddenly rumbling hopper. Mr. Trigg brought it back empty.

"Good-bye," Julie said. "I wish there were something I could do, too."

Mr. Trigg looked down at her, and his moustache smiled. "It's been a nice stop," he said. George was nodding vigorously with friendship from the alley.

"It isn't for folks like you or me to help. Though we're the ones that see," Mr. Trigg said.

And the truck rolled on.

Afterward, standing in the yard under a neat starved tree trying to blossom, under a window, she heard Mr. Gilson and her mother getting ready to go on a golfing trip.

Mr. Gilson said, "You got these dilatory habits from living with a—"

"Please, please, never mind. I'm hurrying," her mother said. "I'll be on time. For when they come."

"I notice that Julie has the same slack habits," Mr. Gilson said. "It's disgraceful in a well-ordered house, and it's harmful to her future prospects. Such as they may be. She needs the discipline of a good New England school, my dear, where she can be with young girls of . . . better origins."

"Oh, darling," her mother said, and from the drawl and  
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pause she must have kissed him lightly. "Must we talk about it now? Let's just . . ."

Julie didn't hear any more. She went away somewhere. She thought she had better keep out of sight for awhile, until they left.

## T W E N T Y

*Sunday night Jim was sitting in front of* his empty typewriter, waiting for his goodnight from Wooller on the city desk. Starting dull, like nearly all Sunday afternoons in a city room, it had turned into a hell of an evening, and he was tired. Presently he saw Sherwood dodging about in the distance. Sherwood made many dark grimaces, both eyes looking conspiratorially at him. It was the first time Jim had seen him since Friday. He guessed the kid had had a day off. Jim winked, and Sherwood vanished happily.

Nearly all winter the kid hadn't had an overcoat. He would come to work every afternoon blue with cold, and twice as ugly, looking twice as ill-made, with his hands hanging by their bony wrists from his too-short sleeves. But he had the snappy hat, and he must have been saving up because one day late in January, when the winter was nearly over, he appeared proudly in an overcoat. It was some overcoat—it matched the hat; Sherwood kept it on a coathanger and was often seen brushing it with his

hand. There was a Jap tailor around the corner in a side street, and a couple of the younger reporters sneaked Sherwood's overcoat to him. Sherwood did a lot of agonized sleuthing, with an uncertainly fixed smile on his face. But the younger men on the staff were blank, though loudly and wonderingly sympathetic, and the older men were irritated because they didn't know what it was about, and no one liked to have to notice a copy boy. The news editor snarled at him once and after that Sherwood scurried faster with his copy. Then the Jap brought the coat back, carrying it impassively on a hanger. It had been cut away into a long tailcoat, it was dyed a bright bottle-green and had a lot of brass buttons and gold-braided frogs on it, like a bad dream of a doorman's coat. That was probably what the two reporters had told the Jap it was for, and it must have cost them quite a lot of money. It was a terrific practical joke, and after the first awful blink or two, no one laughed more raucously than Sherwood. It was storming again outside, but Sherwood's face kept a sort of deformed radiance. Some of the real reporters had played this good joke on him. It made him kind of one of the gang, he thought, probably.

Remembering that tonight, Jim did not smile. He thought of another child with a funny coat. He got up and went over to the city desk.

"All through with me?" he said.

Wooller glanced up, and then at the clock. "Near enough," he said. "Goodnight, Jim."

Jim found Sherwood hanging around the door of the sports department.

"Come on, Sherwood. Let's go get a glass of beer," he said.

Startled out of all his hot-shot toughness, Sherwood said, "Oh, Mr. Kerry . . ." And then he recovered himself. "Sure. Why not?" but his voice quavered terribly.

Going down in the elevator, Sherwood glared sternly in opposite directions, but he seemed to have trouble getting a cigarette out of his package.

"Here. Have one of mine," Jim said.

"Thanks," Sherwood said out of the corner of his mouth. His eyes, though, tried to fasten themselves on Jim's face with an expression that Jim looked away from.

They went down the street to the Dutchman's, and standing at the bar near three copy-readers, one with his green eyeshade on, Jim said:

"Two beers."

The bartender reached for the spiggot and then stopped and looked at Sherwood.

"It's all right, Al," Jim said. "He's old enough."

And Sherwood did look taller.

"If you say so, Jim," Al said, and slid two glasses wetly across the bar.

Sherwood stood looking down at his for a moment, without touching it. Then he lifted his head and looked at Jim, and even such eyes could shine with the excellence and dignity of life.

"It's my first glass of beer," he said, very low.

Jim tried to remember his first drink. He couldn't. It was

too long ago, and too much had happened since. And then he became aware that Sherwood was making up a speech. Sherwood opened his mouth once or twice, his eyes still trying to fix themselves on Jim's.

"I'm . . . honored that it's with you, Mr. Kerry," he said.

With his poor dark face uplifted, he raised his glass.

"Sunny skies!" he said.

And Jim wondered in what direction, for him.

Jim had got up too late to shave that morning, and he had been on a dirty story since late afternoon, a brutal-looking baldheaded millworker and a rather sweet-faced middle-aged woman dead together since sometime Saturday night in a parked car. He wanted to clean up and put on a fresh shirt before he saw Anne. He went back to his hotel and hurried through a shave and shower; he thought once of the man's hand, half-covered with a web of blood, fallen in an attitude that looked curiously tender, and laying the pistol, like a gift, in the woman's lap. While he was putting on his shirt and still while he was tying his tie before the mirror, he kept hearing somebody knocking softly somewhere down the corridor.

When he went out, he saw that it was a woman at old Vol-lard's door. In the shadowy hall she was standing as if listening before she knocked again, but as Jim passed she turned partly away and bent her head, so he could not see her face. She was quietly dressed; by her figure, no longer young. She seemed . . . respectable.

When he looked back from the elevator alcove, he saw that

she must have turned slowly as he passed, to keep her back to him. Her head was still bent, but she was listening again.

In the taxi, through long streets almost empty, he looked at the high buildings of downtown, Sunday-night dark, where behind the windows tomorrow morning there would be people, floors upon floors of them. Thousands of girls in Monday-morning freshness of clothes, young men with the cheap sports-jackets of weekend hung away at home, hundreds of thousands of filing cabinets containing tons of old papers exactly tabulated and, outside the closed important doors with names on them, the air of a continuation of high school. The air, the feuds and crushes, the emotions, the voices, because most of these people had come from the discipline of high school into the discipline of big offices with only slight readjustments of mental routine. In the course of his work Jim had sometimes gone into these downtown buildings, and a long room of desks and filing cabinets smelled like a high school class-room, and the talk in the halls was not different.

Then the taxi was going through the apartment-house districts where the windows were all lighted instead of all dark, and Jim felt the familiar heavy sense of thousands of lives crowding, crowding in. Even when they were unheard, even when you were almost alone somewhere, as now, their massed emanations, the massed weight of their presences were there, crowding in, leaving no space to throw wide the arms of your soul, leaving no open space. Sometimes when he was tired to sickness, Jim would lie in his hotel bed, behind his locked door, and clinging with his body to his bed in the darkness he would think: "This . . . this is sanctuary." But it couldn't be, because pretty soon the

hoarse gutturals of the city would begin again, and another day would come—hell, the chambermaid would knock on his door after awhile. There was no space for the mind, no rest; there was no sanctuary. And then, as Anne opened her door to him, he knew there was.

She kissed him as softly as if they had had years together, and her arms were as natural on his shoulders, and her breast as cool against his. "I'm glad you're here," she said.

She walked to the middle of the living room floor and stood looking at him and he knew that this was about her father. Probably he had got money from her again. But it wasn't that. It was terror of what he would do here. Some lurid and goatish enterprise—

"It's all right, kid," he said.

She merely turned and walked away, to the windows. "Fix us a drink?" she said.

"One for you," he said. "I'm the wrong kind of tired for a drink tonight."

She walked to the divan and sat down with her head thrown back and where the light struck her face it was wet. Not quite looking at her, fumbling in his pocket for a book of matches, he thought that the difference between evil and folly was so slight that only those who loved could tell it.

"The old boy's all right," he said. "People would only laugh."

He knew instantly, of course, that it was the wrong thing to say. She only got a bit whiter about the nostrils. But it was so hard to let her know, out of his long, tired experience that nothing human was worth more than the briefly lowered eyes of

charity, the briefly lifted hat of recognition. He thought: no sin that could not be mine, no covetousness that I could not feel, no folly . . . no folly that has not its grease in my heart, too. My sleep too, he thought, is restless; I too sleep with the gray-ing companion, Failure; I too look in the mirror and then at the telephone in hope of hearing some other voice besides that which never stops in my mind. There is no medicine to let us sleep—we who sin against our own minds. There is no sedative in any bottle to quiet us to innocence again. The nearest we can hope for is the touch of a bewildered hand. He said:

“There’s nothing to worry about. I think I understand your old man pretty well.”

“No you don’t, but I don’t want to talk about it,” she said.

He sat down heavily beside her and when his lips touched her cheek he tasted salt. He thought how strange it was that men and women always started knowing each other with laughter—as if laughter, as if gaiety and sparkle were the bases of life—but not until a man tasted his woman’s tears was there likely to be the sacrament in the heart, the sacrament of gentleness and of impermanence. He said:

“I love you, Anne.”

She put her face in the curve of his shoulder, and he sat there listening to her breath growing slower and slower, more and more regular. After awhile, when he was thinking of something else, she touched his neck with her mouth.

“Feeling better, kid?” he asked.

Lying against him, with her eyes closed, she sent one hand wandering in search of his. As he held it, he thought how square and capable, he had heard somewhere that good musicians’

hands were never long and tapering as most people thought, but always square and strong. And her hand suddenly twisted his and she was breathing differently.

Turning his head slowly, slowly, he looked down at her face. Her broad and lovely eyebrows, slightly contracted, with a line between them he had never seen; her lips half parted, showing a gleam of teeth— He thought how strange that only in death and love does the human face become mortally honest— only at the end of life and at the creation of life. With a shrinking away of nerves at the pit of his stomach, of conscious nerves, he said:

“Let’s have that drink, and talk.”

“No. No,” she said.

Her arm went about his neck and with astonishing strength pulled him closer. But her mouth was still soft. Though it groped for his mouth, not until he kissed her with all his experience did it move—and then it was to tear itself away. And then she was pushing him away with one hand on his chest, and without a sound, without another movement, was looking past his face with strange, far-guessing eyes. He drew his breath to speak, and she instantly moved her hand from his chest to his lips. And closed her eyes again.

Gently he drew her to her feet, and not kissing each other again, not even touching each other again, they went into the bedroom. He walked to the window and waited, listening to her undress in the shadows behind him. The street was empty except for one man hurrying, and for a high wind which hunted a piece of paper, whirling and helpless, along the sidewalk. He heard her go with stumbling soft feet to the bed, and after a



moment he turned around. There was a light burning in the hall, just outside the door. He left it on.

She had put on a moon-colored nightgown with a yoke of darker lace covering her breasts, but she was lying half turned away from the side of the bed she had left for him. After a desperate and confused time of her awkwardness against his experience, he realized that she didn't know at all what was to be done. "Here," he said. "Like this. My dear, my dear—"

Her hands, her helpless startled hands, suddenly took hold of his upper arms and clung, as if for reassurance and strength, as if for comfort. And in the now irretrievable brutality of pity and love and force he had to see her pain, her white, patient pain. With a gasp not quite a sob, her convulsive flinching was suddenly over and her body was free to him, forever. And after awhile as he lay with his face against the lace on her shoulder, laboring to get his breath again, she gently pushed his face up into the light and looked at him with wonder, not knowing what had happened to him.

And still awhile later she seemed so quiet, and he thought: The hand unclaspings, falling away in sleep, is marriage.

## T W E N T Y - O N E

*He must have been sleeping heavily the next morning when she got up to go to work. He had been married so many years, and working nights, that he knew only in the*

locked, the do-not-disturb room of his mind when the woman got out of the bed and dressed for her different day. He awoke, and lay listening to the sounds of an unfamiliar street, and from other studio-apartments the Monday morning sounds of music teachers. There were none of Anne's clothes lying around, the dark gray dress, the underthings she had taken off last night. The brush and comb, the round clear plastic box of powder, the two or three bottles of perfume and toilet water, were exactly neat upon her dressing table. He got up and looked about. He had thought she might perhaps have left a note, but there was none. The bathroom smelled faintly of her bath and her powder. He dressed and went into the living room. His coat and hat were lying on the chair near the front door. In the kitchen he found most of a pot of coffee she had left for him. He heated it up and drank two cups black. He didn't want any breakfast. The kitchen clock said 11:15. He wanted a bath and fresh clothes, but before he left he stood in the living room smoking a cigarette and looking around with new seeing at Anne's things, the place where she lived. In years to come, in other places, this room would always be his to return to in his mind: though buildings were torn down, though all things would change, himself and Anne, too, as long as he was alive this room would remain, intact, in the world. He thought how strange it was that the dear places which through the mutations of time you lose, you own forever. The people you lose are truly lost.

He went out and took a streetcar downtown, and about the middle of the afternoon he was standing in the department store watching her at her pipe organ. The piece she was playing was methodically sentimental, it filled the store as charmingly as the

concealed lights. She was wearing a white serge suit, very straight in the back, with black braid at the collar and the cuffs. Anything they had to say to each other today they would have to say now, because this was one of his late nights this week and he wouldn't get off until two o'clock in the morning, too late to go to her apartment. She saw him in her mirror above the keyboards, and when she reached the end of the piece she shut off the organ and flipped on the switch that started the record machine playing over the loud speaker system. Eight records, she had said, it played for her rest periods. It wasn't much time for whatever they had to say to each other today.

She came down the red-carpeted steps and glancing at him once, studiously looked down to unhook the crimson velvet rope from its brass posts. Stepping around it, she turned and as carefully hooked it on again. They walked together through the people, toward the stairs which led down to the coffee-shop. He was terribly conscious of her body walking in the straight white suit. With small melting flinches at the pit of his stomach he was conscious of her hurt body under the swing of the skirt. On the stairs he said :

"Hello, today."

"Hello, Jim," she said very clearly. By the time they had found a table in the coffee-shop the first record was finished and there was a pause before the next one started playing. As soon as his voice was covered by the music again, he leaned across the table.

"Are you all right?" he asked.

"I . . . don't know," she said.

The waitress came.

"Two coffees," Jim said. "Do you want anything to eat, darling?"

"No," Anne said.

"Did you have any lunch?" he said.

Anne's hands clenched as if she wanted to scream 'Oh, for God's sake—' but she said "Oh, yes, thank you. I had lunch."

The record was loud and gay, with industrious cascades of plucked strings. When she looked at him it was not with anything so obvious as stricken eyes, the sort of thing a reporter would have thought of to say (for such is professional habit, and so does it give different men different things to see), but her eyes did seem to have gathered and to hold an unusual quantity of light from this overlighted room. It was a queer circumstance where only for the time it took eight phonograph records to play could they talk about their profound shattering change, and talk about their lives. There was so much to say, two lifetimes to be made plain, that they— Their coffee came, and the second record ended with immense energy of bells, cymbals, sawing violins, and orchestral crashes. In the pause he said:

"Cream and sugar?"

"No thank you," she said

Over the loudspeaker system you could hear the mechanical clicks and the sandy whisper of the next record coming on. As the music started they lifted their coffee-cups, and bending slightly forward, sipped. They set their cups down at the same time. Her smooth head, so perfectly her own today—impossible that it had lain rumpled and damp in the crook of his arm. About halfway through the record he said:

"I wish I could come out tonight. I wish it weren't one of my late nights."

"I know. I remembered it this morning," she said.

"I could call up Eddie—"

"Oh, no. Don't do that," she said.

Perhaps they were both relieved. Perhaps they needed time, a little time alone in the exact and manageable routines of their own lives; for their lives were still separate. But their shocked bodies knew each other; across the table and under the table their bodies were weak with a oneness, a fusion begun, which their still independent minds would be slower to find as natural.

In the next interval between records, she leaned a little across the table. Her white jacket fell straight from the button at her throat. That tailored plane denied breasts which knew that freedom and another night were coming. She said without breath:

"But you will call me up this evening? At the regular time?"

He said yes, of course he would. While he was partly conscious—where men and women were lonely and uncertain—of the obscure, the painful play of counterpoint between the hesitant mind and the desiring flesh. Sometime during the playing of that record her eyes were looking indirectly at his shoulders, his arms. If she, as well, seemed terribly conscious of his body it was still questioningly, still without workable knowledge of what had happened or what was to come. She looked quickly away.

"This coffee tastes good. It's been a long day. I was tired," she said.

"We should have gone to a bar," he said.

"Oh, no—not this early."

They didn't, after all, have anything to say. Only, their bodies were in silent dialogue . . . in promises, in desire, in tenderness.

Hurriedly she said, "Mary Gerdner asked me to dinner to-morrow night. I think I'll call her and tell her I can't come."

"Oh, well," he said vaguely.

"They want you to come some night. On your night off. Sometime."

"All right," he said.

"They left it up to you. Mary said just let her know."

"Fine," he said, and got a look at her eyes. He saw they would never go to the Gerdners', now, until they were married, and maybe not for quite awhile after that. Anne would never trust her face, with him, where Mary Gerdner, her best friend, could see it. He was glad of that, but he thought of the malice there is in women, the deeply affectionate malice. When one is without it, she is loved by some man forever, and distrusted by all women.

The next record was of a string quartet, playing a skipping, rose-withered air. He had lost track, but he could see that she was keeping count of the records, one by one. Over the loud-speakers the strings were mentioning delicately a faraway, an artificial sadness. False sighs in velvet waistcoats, tears perhaps real on the cheeks of girls, long gone, with curls caught up and pinned. Looking at Anne's averted head he thought of men and girls. Whose bodies only could be eloquent for them—until a poet spoke; whose sorrows and fears were too fragile for them—but not for music. Men and women who could not touch each

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other more closely than in bed, but whose inarticulate beautiful, brutal gropings, in tears or in tenderness, made great art, or the terrible news stories he sometimes had to write.

In the silence of the loudspeakers they glanced at each other, and then away. The next record started with a blare of trumpets, and Anne stood up.

"I have to go now," she said. "Call me tonight."

She went quickly out, among the crowded tables, but he had to stay to get their check and pay it. When it was done with, he was glad to get away from that noisy place. He hurried up the steps, as she had hurried.

When he went out a side door into the gray street, the records were still playing. There had been nothing to say. He guessed she wanted to be alone for awhile, for what few minutes she could.

## T W E N T Y - T W O

*Late that night Jim and another man were coming down some dirty, dark stairs. The stairs creaked under their feet. In an upper hall they had left eight or ten half-dressed neighbors standing around an open door, and inside a dusty-lighted room two of the coroner's young men with their long wicker basket and a couple of bored dicks. One of the dicks had taken out a toothpick and begun to use it as they left. Jim would*

always be a little surprised at the doll-like quality of corpses, most of them. At the bottom of the stairs the other man held the door open. The gas-jet, suddenly blowing, caught the thin glitter of the Cross on his black vest before he buttoned his overcoat. The cold air, though smelling of coal-smoke, was good after the mustiness of the tenement—the acrid human mustiness from many years of people living poorly. He was a young priest, about Jim's age, and as they walked along the miserably lighted street the business of 'father' and 'my son' would have been out of place between them.

"Nothing there for me," Jim said.

"No. Not there," the priest said. From the look on his face he might have been thinking of all the poor rooms in the world where people lie dead. His face was gaunt with youth, with learning, and with compassion.

"But it always bothers me, a little," Jim said. "What they were thinking about at the last. You can't tell by looking at them."

The priest smiled. He, too, was one of the figures of the city's night. Others might fail; the proud givers were not seen in streets like this after nightfall; but even where the cops went down in pairs, there was always a Catholic priest there when one was needed.

"The gentle die gently," he said. "Even in the case of violence, their gentleness allows them to release consciousness easily. You get out of life, perhaps, the manner of receiving death."

They both had seen many die. If most had been terrible indeed, it was because the mind of man was dark with violences

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unknown even to himself in his days of good sun. They both had seen too much, and not too differently. And walking together, where the dim street lights were very far apart, it is possible that neither excepted his own mind.

The priest glanced at Jim. And hesitated. "But the Gentlest of all was not allowed to die easily," he said. "He had to die for all men and all women—for the violent, among them."

He looked even a little apologetic, and said no more about it. He was so certain, in his strict tenets, of damnation and also of forgiveness that he could let you be forgetful.

They passed in the darkness a woman standing in a darker doorway. She never moved. But the priest's eyes were calm and hopeless as they had been in that room. He spoke then of children:

"It is easy to use the word 'blessed.' I am supposed to know what it means, but I . . . am not always sure. Perhaps I am not yet wise enough, or old enough. It seems to me, though, that children can still draw goodness, and bestow it, from the source where we must beg."

"Yes," Jim said.

"You have children?"

"One. A little girl."

They came to a brighter corner, and Jim hailed a cruising taxi.

"Can I give you a lift," he said, his hand on the door-handle.

"No, thank you. I haven't far to go."

They had talked as two men, walking in a mean street. For a moment they stood looking at each other. Until Jim said abruptly:

"Goodnight."

The priest smiled again, and lifted one hand a little.

"Goodnight, my son," he said.

Around 2:30 that morning when Jim got back to his hotel he saw Vollard's door partly open, a width of light across the worn carpet of the hall. The old boy was standing by his bureau with a drink, but as Jim passed he came across the room beckoning and saying, in the cautious hoarseness of men who have been asked to leave other hotels: "Come in. Come in." He was in his shirtsleeves, his bow tie was askew and one end was longer than the other. He had an indefinable air of having been immaculately dressed in the early evening, but of having redressed with somewhat less leisure later on. He poured Jim a drink, and carried the glass into the bathroom to fill it up with water.

It was better whisky than he had had to offer before. It was a fifth of bonded rye. Beside his half-empty glass lay a decayed gardenia, its stem wrapped in lead-foil with a green-headed pin through it, its petals scorched by contact with human skin. It looked as if it had been carried home in a pocket. He came back from the bathroom with Jim's drink; they waved their glasses carelessly toward each other and drank thoughtfully. When he put his glass down, Vollard gazed fixedly for a moment at the gardenia. He picked it up and smelled it, with high grizzled eyebrows as if to say: How the hell did I get into this? Without turning, he pitched it through the open window onto the roofs somewhere below. "I now fix the age of consent at forty-five," he said.

He took two large swallows of his drink. Uncapping the bottle, he poured Jim's glass to the brim again, and filled his own half-full but didn't go into the bathroom for any more water.

"Had a partner one time," he said. "His weakness was women. He was a smart dealer, but his smartness ended at five o'clock. I got a hurry call from the manager of a bar one time. Here was a beautiful gazelle lined up at the bar. She was in a highly emotional state. She was telling everybody in the place: 'That Owen Bathurst is a rat. He promised to be true to me, and now I hear his wife is pregnant.' "

Vollard looked faintly shocked in remembrance, and said, "He didn't know how to deal with women. His emotional eccentricities broke up our partnership."

Over his drink Jim wondered about Anne—what she looked like at this minute, her face, asleep; or if she was awake what her lonely and frightened thoughts were.

"I tried to tell him," Vollard said. "I know women. I know all about women, and I tried to tell him.—I suspect you do too, son."

Jim glanced at him sharply and then indifferently shook his head, but he could not help the little, preening half-smile with which any man denies such a compliment. It was silly, but he felt that fatuous expression on his face.

They drank companionably, and Vollard said, "Don't mistake me. When I mention the age of forty-five, it is because usually only then is a woman in command of negotiable securities. I was speaking of emotional safety. For an unwise man there is no safety in a woman's age. An older woman may be . . . less noisy; but vanity dies only with the heart."

Peering into the bottom of his glass, Jim knew absent-mindedly—she had never had to tell him—why the business about her father had made Anne what she had always been where men were concerned. She was afraid, she was afraid to trust herself; afraid of letting herself become involved. Imaginatively? Yes. That was it, imaginatively. But "*You are different, Jim,*" she had said one night. "*I have always known it . . . from that first time I saw you.*" She said she used to think of him. He had entered her imagination. She said she used to think about him nearly all the time.

But turning his glass slowly around he thought that she wouldn't marry him until her father left to go away somewhere again. She would not let her wedding be ruined. The neck of the bottle appeared over the rim of his glass.

After the first lavish splash Vollard poured steadily until Jim said, "Hey!" Leaving the old boy pouring and squinting for himself, Jim went into the bathroom for some water. While he was letting the tap run to get it cold he was shocked by another idea. Perhaps part of her awful stillness this afternoon had been because she felt as if her father, coming back just when he did, when she was in helpless emotional imbalance, had brought looseness into her life, long-repressed havoc to herself. He filled his glass and went out into the room. He looked at his watch. It was too late to call her again.

"This is my last one," he said. "I'm getting the worries—the early-morning worries."

Vollard didn't pay any attention.

"But there's one woman," he said, "that I always turn to in thought when my . . . professional experiences with women

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are saddening to me. That is my daughter. I know too much, perhaps, about women; and knowing them, I know my little Anne. It has helped me, sometimes in the most disillusioning circumstances, to know that there's one woman—my daughter—who would not seek intimacies or permit them before marriage." Jim stared at him. The old boy's eyes were positively suffused—it was the only word for it—with a purity of sentiment.

Jim thought: The guy who knows all about women. . . .

With queer pride, Jim thought: At no matter what age, Julie could never fool me about anything.

"Anne and I are going to be married," he said.

Vollard set his glass down, and stood more straightly. "I won't pretend I'm surprised," he said. "I've seen you together. That is why I spoke as I did just now. I wanted you to know about my little Anne. I . . . Son, I am very happy for you both."

They shook hands with the most extraordinary solemnity, and then Vollard did an odd thing. He laid his cheek against Jim's for a moment.

"I like you, son," he said. "This calls for another one."

"Well . . ." Jim said.

"Don't be alarmed," the old boy said. "I don't intend to question you about your prospects. I . . . sometimes don't feel much like a father, anyway, any more."

"All right," Jim said.

This drink was poured with the greatest meticulous ceremony, the glasses were clinked together with care, and sternly they drank. As they stood rocking back and forth on their heels, frowning at their glasses, Vollard said:

"Anne tells me that you, too, have a little daughter."

"Oh—yes. Yes," Jim said. He cleared his throat.

He felt the high, tinny silence in his ears which meant that he was getting tight. "What else did she tell you?" he asked.

"Why, nothing. Nothing, son," Vollard said. "What's the matter?"

"What do you mean, matter?" Jim said.

Vollard looked at him with faraway, legalistic concern. Everything was getting pretty swimmy, anyway. "What's bothering, about your little girl?" Vollard asked.

"I'm not supposed to ever see her," Jim said, and was conscious of another small betrayal, to be talking about it. He cleared his throat again and hastily took another swallow of his drink. "My wife got full custody."

"Ah. Dreadful," Vollard said. "Forbidden to participate in the natural, the tender relationship of a father to his child."

"Well, more or less," Jim said.

"That is damnable! It is a foul savagery of the law, sir!" Vollard said. "No matter what your wife may have had on you at the time she obtained the divorce."

Jim didn't say anything, but waved his drink vaguely.

"Show me the man without the peccadillos of Adam and I will show you a man without enterprise or imagination," Vollard said. "But narrowly moral and vindictive women are permitted by law to inflict atrocious penalties, to strike a man to the heart for mere passing indiscretions." He seemed suddenly to remember Anne, fixing Jim with a startled eye. "I . . . uh, I am speaking in principle only," he said weakly.

After taking refuge in his own drink for a moment, he hur-

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ried back to the safer part of the subject: "But about your little daughter. Surely a smart lawyer could dream up some recourse by which—"

"Hell with it," Jim said. "I see her, all right. Every Friday. Every Friday afternoon after school. We meet each other in a park, and nobody knows a damned thing about it."

"Oh, sad! Sad," Vollard said. "What do you do there?"

"Well . . . just sit and talk."

"Pitiable! Never has a more grievous case come to my attention," Vollard said. "What park?"

"Sheridan."

"Ah, I see it all vividly in my mind's eye. The secret waiting, the familiar figure appearing in the distance, the meeting, the little child flying to her father's arms—O Furies! The work of a woman.—I once had a series of assignations there myself. Of a different character, of course."

He drank again slowly, with faraway eyes.

"And what is the little girl's name?" he asked.

"Julie."

"Charming. Charming," Vollard said absent-mindedly.

But in his eyes Jim saw it stored away; from long habit of storing away every item, however trivial, about everyone he met. The shrewd, two-bit habit of finding out and of secreting in his mind facts which mostly he would never use, but which gave him a marble-eyed feeling of omnipresence, and which occasionally came in handy in his business.

*All the uncertainties—all the painful* muteness of an inexperienced woman in physical love, and the last of Jim's lingering carelessness—were blown away with a soft breath one night when Anne said :

"I'm so safe when you're this near."

He had thought with guilt that she had been anything but safe with him. He said, "I'm glad you feel that way."

"For so long I had nothing. I have been afraid," she said.

"It's all right now," he said uneasily.

"Yes. Now you are between me and the world. You're between me and all the people. Nothing ugly or—or hateful can come past you."

All the poor years alone, and she had chosen him. He was the first man she had ever taken into her mind, or her body. A betrayer in his careless heart, he was the first protection she had ever had. With his face turned away, he moistened his dry lips with his tongue.

"I love you, Jim," she murmured.

He reached out and touched her hand. For him, the old pattern was repeating itself. For her—for her it was the beginning.

"When you come to me you give me your strength," she said.

He thought how lamentable the illusion, and how filled with peril for her. He hoped she would never find out, but he knew



she would. But by that time she would love him differently. Even Julie knew already how weak he was, and how often afraid. His fingers tightened on Anne's, and two human hands clung in the darkness.

"Give me your strength again now," she said.

He found her rumpled head on the pillow, and touched her closed eyes with his lips, in protection, forever, to the best that his fallible heart and his fears would let him.

"Jim," she whispered.

#### T W E N T Y - F O U R

*But it seemed to Julie that along about* that time, as the spring came on, his stories changed.

"Look, honey," he said, "have I ever told you about the time they tore down the old Stuart Hotel? It was quite a few years ago. Before—before you were born.

"It was a mouldy old brick hotel. On First Avenue, and it had a lot of history in it. There's a market there now, but back in the 'Nineties it had been the big grand place of the city. Everybody famous, and carriages driving up under the gas-lights.

"The rooms were enormous, with high old-fashioned ceilings and massive door-knobs and bathroom fittings, and there was a good deal of faded velvet about. In the dining room they still kept the colored waiters who had been working for many years. A lot of them were over seventy.

"When the building was being junked we thought it would make a good story, so I went down."

Julie looked at him, puzzled, but kept very still. The wonders, their own kind of magic, must be somewhere in it, but probably later on.

"The wreckers were breaking up the Crystal Room," Jim said.

"Some of the old colored waiters had come in, just to stand around. I guess they came every day until it was gone. It had been their life, the part of life that counted most. They were careful to keep out of the way of the wreckers.

"Well, I went through the hotel, as much of it as was left. There was still quite a lot of the faded velvet. Nobody had bought it. So I went back to the office and wrote a story.

"I said that maybe there were shadowy figures in the halls, indignant ghosts in satin and in top hats walking through the falling plaster and the men in overalls." His voice had the briskness of quoting, not the dreamy sound of making up a new story.

"I said that late at night, when the city was asleep, maybe there was a sound of hooves in the empty street, and down the great ruined staircase to the Crystal Room might come a company—long-ago ladies in jewels of moonlight, under the high broken windows, and men whose names are still remembered—names of the past coming down the staircase one time more.

"I said that maybe . . ." his voice went on for awhile longer.

Even Julie had read news stories like that. Even she knew that it was formula for one type of news story.

Walking her lonely way home, she wondered numbly why he had told it to *her*.

And the Friday after that, he started even more unlike the way he usually did, the way he always had.

"One of the funniest things that ever happened," he said, "was the afternoon a friend of mine got married. A fellow named Crosse—I don't suppose you remember him, but he and his wife used to come to the house a good deal."

Eagerly she said, "Oh, but Jim, I do remember. Of course I remember."

"Well, most newspaper weddings are pretty scrambled," he said. "They seem . . . inadequate at the time. But the results are usually good, Miss Kerry. And you are very beautiful today."

"Thank you, Jim," she said, and looked down at her faded beret, twisted in her hands. His voice had had the heavy jocular-ity which most grownups use to children. In all the time she had known him, Jim had never done that before. But beside her on the bench lay a flat box of chocolates. It was the most candy he had ever brought her. Uneasily, she said, "Tell me once upon a time."

"But—that's what I *am* doing," he said. She felt him turn, surprised, but she did not lift her head. After a minute his voice began again, hesitantly, but gaining assurance as he went on and on:

"Well, here we were waiting in the judge's chambers. I was going to stand up with them, and there was a friend of Dorothy's—I forget her name. Plain girl. I think a teacher at the university. This judge had a big murder trial on, a pretty bad one,

and it was late in the afternoon. So after awhile the clerk came in with a big armload of the exhibits, and dumped them on the judge's table. They were pretty tough, all right. Then the judge came in with his black robe all sweeping, and he and I had a drink. Nobody else wanted one until afterward. He took off his robe and stood us all up beside the table to marry them. Dorothy comes from a respectable family in Des Moines, and standing beside those exhibits her face . . .”

He made quite a long story of it, and where he seemed especially amused she tried to laugh. But it sounded too loud and too shrill, so after that she only smiled. It was a good story, she could tell, and after all he was sharing it with her. She was included in his grownup days.

But that night when she got home she went upstairs and again stood before the mirror in her bathroom door, staring anxiously. She wondered if she herself was changing in some wrong mysterious way, that everything—Jim, and the stories, and the magic—that everything should be different.

## T W E N T Y - F I V E

*She thought she would never forget the afternoon that Jim brought Miss Vollard to the park. The taxi stopped and Jim climbed out, and then turned back to help an unknown woman to alight.*

Julie watched, putting her hands in her coat pockets, shoving them harder and harder in because they felt so helpless. She would not let Jim see that she was betrayed. It was another sorrow, and she had learned long since that sorrow is ugly only when shown to others.

"Anne, this is the youngster," Jim said in a hearty voice. "Julie, Miss Vollard is an old friend of mine."

Julie bowed her head, so her eyes would not be seen. She welcomed Jim's friend into their place, the only place they had.

This Miss Vollard was spotless-looking in a white wool suit with black braid at the collar and the cuffs. Glancing a little farther up, Julie saw that her eyes were clear, promising not to say the things that usual grownups said. She said nothing. But as if something in Julie's own eyes confused her, she looked away, and then at Jim again. Too much as if Jim belonged to her.

Not noticing the silence, Jim swung his shoulders around and started for the bench. It might have been better, Julie felt, if this Miss Vollard had gushed over her and she could have been childishly charming right back, as every child early learns to be with gushing grownups. After the first step or two Miss Vollard caught up with him and walked beside him, and Julie came plodding along just behind them. It struck her that Jim looked foolish—for the first time in her life, Jim looked unpowerful—with a couple of females, a big one and a small one, tagging along with him. It was still more wretched when they all sat in a row on the bench. Julie shrank within herself.

Miss Vollard laid one hand on Jim's arm.

"The view is lovely from here," she said, but bending forward to smile past him at Julie. "The whole city, almost. I hadn't

realized how lovely it is." So Jim had told her. Everything, probably.

"Yes, isn't it?" Julie said. "Jim— Well, Jim what kind of a week has it been for you?" She tried to make her voice sound curt and companionable, but it only sounded thin.

Nobody seemed to hear it, though, for Jim was looking negligently at Miss Vollard, and Miss Vollard must have been thinking of something else to say. She leaned forward again and said to Julie:

"It's a nice place for you and Jim to have found. I'll always like to think of it."

"Yes, isn't it nice?" Julie said. The violation of any secret world is appalling.

"I've—I've thought so much about it," Miss Vollard said. "It's something that you'll remember when you're older. When you're as old as I am."

"I guess so," Julie said. The secret worlds we make to live in can be shared with others only by children and by the greatest artists. And Julie—Julie was leaving childhood.

"You have so little that's . . . that's beautiful to remember when you're my age," Miss Vollard said. One could tell it was something she had thought about and planned how to say. "You and Jim sitting here alone, all these afternoons. I . . . I wish that . . ."

"Yes," Julie tried to say. In most of us, in nearly all, the burdened and frightened heart is silent. We live by obscure and unacknowledged magics, and the best-meaning hand, sometimes more than the most savage, can point to something beautiful and

make it foolish. We can turn away, we can turn away. The difficulty is in coming back.

Turning away, her eyes becoming helplessly fixed on the empty sky beyond the hills, Julie sat for awhile as emptily, while the silence on the bench grew longer and longer. Then, little by little, she felt a curious thing: a pressure, beginning, growing—she felt it as a physical pressure inside her chest, mounting and tightening until it began to hamper her breathing. Something had to be broken. She didn't know. She couldn't think. Something—something had to be done. Not thinking at all, she was astonished to hear her own voice saying brightly:

“—Oh, Jim! I've been having the most exciting times! This week. You'll never guess!” Confusing herself still more, she seized his hand and made him look down at her.

“Huh?” he said.

“Oh, I have so much to tell you—I just scarcely know where to begin!” she said, talking too fast and excitedly. “I . . . I—oh, you're going to be so thrilled!” She didn't have anything to tell him, she didn't have anything at all. But she was started, and she couldn't stop. She was breaking something. She didn't know—her chest hurt and she had to have something gigantic and astounding and drastic to say, to change everything and to make something new and sensational blow up to burst away an emptiness.

Perhaps as if sensing that she was floundering, Miss Volard said quietly, “Jim, isn't that the store down there? See, away uptown where the buildings . . .” But she laid her hand again on Jim's arm.

"Yes. That's right," Jim said. "And see beyond there where the cloud-shadow is, is where you—"

"Jim!" Julie said with a shrillness which glazed her eyes, hearing it, "Jim, I'm just so excited I'm almost to pop! Do you know *what?*"

So he looked at her. He looked at her . . . wonderingly.

She saw that Jim was disappointed in her. This made it worse, hopelessly and more hopelessly worse and worse. She wet her lips. Her lips were moving a little, as if finding something to say.

"Anne, we have a surprise," Jim said gravely.

So that was her name. A very plain name, Julie thought. Still holding to Jim's arm, this Anne bent forward once more, seeing clearly, but waiting. Julie's eyes fell.

Miserable, infuriated . . . then just miserably, obscurely to get back at Jim, she gulped a quick breath and said even more brightly—much more brightly: "—It's to celebrate when I graduate. This year. From the fourth g-grade." She stopped and glanced straight at Jim. She felt her eyes going flat, at what she was going to say. "Mother is going to give me a beautiful graduation party. In that lovely house!"

It was a great whopping lie. Nobody had ever thought of any such thing, and she hadn't until this desperate minute. She gulped again. She couldn't help it.

"Oh," Jim said.

"How nice," Anne said.

"—Just think! Mother and I are making all our plans together. We are so busy," she said, and saw Jim's eyes drift away. Recklessly, she plunged on: "The house all decorated with—"



with beautiful paper streamers and . . . and Japanese lanterns, from the front door to the very attic! And that g-great exquisite lawn out in back, all . . . all . . . And everyone there from school. Around the refreshment tables. A real *orchestra*," she said wildly, "Mother and Mr.—Mother and . . . and . . ." And she closed her eyes against a stinging of horror and shame.

When after awhile she opened them again, Anne was staring serenely out across the city. She didn't know what Jim was doing because she didn't—she couldn't look at him. But maybe he finally felt uncomfortable too, for as if from a distance she heard his voice, hesitant and somehow a little apologetic:

"You know, there's something I've been thinking about. I . . ." Maybe he too was casting about in his mind for something to say. She felt his hand just touch her shoulder.

"I don't think I've ever told you," he said. "It was something that happened a long time ago. It was a sea full of islands.

"I had a kind of a windfall. About eight hundred dollars, and I went there. I don't know why, really, except I had heard of it, from a copy-reader late one night. And I didn't need to work for awhile, not having anyone to worry—not needing to be any special place, in a job. So I got me a ticket. It was a long time ago, and everything was younger. It was swell."

His words, the dreamy way he talked—as if maybe here on this sunny bench was the one place he had become able to talk of the world as he loved it—once more, by habit, by association, by release, he was telling a story. In some dim subsurface budding of the mind, Julie wondered: If this were lost, would he ever talk quite like this again? But his voice was quiet, holding something else, some sadness of his own; it had silences of good-bye

in it, between the words, good-bye to something of his own that she could not know. She lifted up her eyes to him. But his shoulders were turned away; he was telling this one to his friend.

" . . . and the house you live in there," he said, "may be of logs, peeled and oiled. A big living room, and its ceiling would be the steep slanting pitch of the roof itself. All one end of the room will be a fireplace made of native stone. And on the railing of the gallery, where the bedrooms are, there will be deer skins and cougar skins. And at night there will be doe skins, tanned the Indian way, on your bed."

"I know," Miss Vollard said almost timidly. "But—"

Somewhere unformed inside of Julie was the first grim smile of her life. Miss Vollard didn't know Jim's stories.

"Well, I know I can't go there again for a long time. Maybe now I never can," Jim said. "But let me tell you, anyway: One time I was in a boat . . ."

Slowly, Julie looked down at her shoes. Scuffed and patient, their toes turned in toward one another, they waited, not quite touching the ground.

"—one time I was in a boat, off the coast of the mainland, away north in British Columbia, under the peaks," Jim said. "All the rest of my life I've had to work, but I remember that. There are places there where the mountains rise straight from the water, the salt water, to the snow. It was an Indian boat, very dirty, it smelled like hell, and once at evening in an inlet under the peaks I came around a little point of land and saw a mountain ram with great curled horns, standing on a rock above the tide. The tide was flowing, very dark and very strong, and the rock had lichens on it like splashes of Indian paint. I was trolling, the  
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engine was just barely turning over, and maybe he hadn't heard me coming. The point and the timber may have cut off the sound. It was sunset and we looked at each other, the great ram with his golden eyes. Then he turned and went away, up the slope. He seemed to soar with every long jump . . ."

Twisting silently, Julie's shoes met and clung to each other, one toe in an agonized twisting behind the other heel; she saw Miss Vollard open her lips to say something. But whatever it was, she didn't say it. She sat with her hands folded in her lap, staring out over the darkening city. Maybe she too was listening to that something else in Jim's voice, between the words; or maybe it was lonely and strange for her, here on this bench, and night coming on.

And afterward, in the dusk along the avenue, Julie walked silently beside them. Sometimes she had to skip a little, falling out of step, to keep up with them. Then she would make a syncope with her feet, and take a long stride, trying to get back into step with them. They were looking at each other.

With all the storm died away in her narrow breast, with nothing left, Julie gazed at Anne's face. And for the first time in her life—seeing a quiet pain which she could not have known—Julie felt, without knowing it for what it was, compassion for another woman.

*The next Friday afternoon, Julie had to* wait longer than she ever had before for Jim. She sat on the bench watching for him, and kept reminding herself that of course she really had been a little earlier than usual today because she had hurried especially from school; and that only made it seem longer.

But it was a long, long time. The sun was low, and Jim didn't come. She made little games with herself, with time, looking at the river below, saying that when the hundredth little puff of steam came from that distant factory beside the river, he would surely be here. She counted conscientiously, and then when he wasn't there she decided that she had lost count and started counting the little puffs of steam from the beginning again. She was alone. The robin had gone to build a nest somewhere among the leaves of the new springtime; he was too busy to sing any more, while she waited.

Maybe she had dozed a little. Maybe her eyes were closed with drowsiness and not with pain when Jim's taxi was suddenly there, with a squealing of brakes. The sun was gone, and it was twilight in the little park.

"Hello, honey," Jim said. "I'm terribly sorry I'm a little late."

"Hello, Jim," she said.

"I got . . . delayed, and what with one thing and another

I didn't realize, honey," he said uncomfortably. "You know how it is."

"Sure," she said. "That's all right, Jim. That's all right."

"Here," he said, tugging at something in his overcoat pocket. "Here's something. Caramels. Just new. I smelled them cooking when I went past a store."

"Thank you, Jim," she said. They tasted sticky and too sweet in her mouth. It was hard to swallow.

"Well, well," he said in his new hearty voice, on their bench. "Here we are again, honey!"

She did manage to swallow.

"Yes, Jim," she said.

"Well!" he said again. "Once upon a time, hey?"

She nodded, not seeing anything. It was like a crystalline blindness: the gleams of the river, the sunset on the massed clouds in the east, all the lights, were shattered.

"OK," he said. "But I guess we'll kind of have to hurry tonight, won't we? Well, let me see . . . Uh. Mmmm. Sure. Once upon a time," he said, and glanced stealthily at his new wrist-watch. Julie didn't close her eyes; but slowly, slowly her chin sank down upon her breast. "Yeah. Once upon a time," Jim said, "there was an odd sort of little girl who lived in a country of deep snows. Uh. They had hard winters, you know, people being hungry and so on, but in the spring . . ."

It was not a very good story. For the first time since she could remember, it was not a good story. And it was short, and he ended quickly on a lame statement. They walked out of the little park together, across the avenue and down the sidewalks.

At the usual corner he bent down hastily, and his mouth brushed her cheek.

"So long, honey," he said.

"Good-bye, Jim," she whispered. "Good-bye, good-bye."

He hurried away, not looking back, and went into a brightly-lighted bar, thrusting into his pocket as if for a nickel to phone with. Standing on the sidewalk, she looked down at the frayed cuff of her coat-sleeve. For a minute. Until she could see.

Then she walked steadily toward home.

## T W E N T Y - S E V E N

*Brunn had juggled the schedules again, and* that Saturday night Crosse was on the city desk and Jim was stuck late. About one o'clock they were sitting opposite each other at the big scarred desk, checking through the Second Home. The papers were still damp and the pages clung together with static electricity from the presses. Jim leaned back in the swivel-chair to strike a match and saw a man standing just inside the city room; he had come along the corridor of the files from the elevator. He was a big man, heavy, tailored with conservative richness. He was the sort of man you see sitting alone in the club car of the Twentieth Century Limited. He was weaving slightly on his feet, staring around the cluttered almost empty city room with swimmy eyes and an uncertain smile.

"Page six column three," Jim said. "Bitched line in the second paragraph."

"OK," Crosse said. "Fix it, will you?"

Jim punched into the paper with Eddie's shears, clipped the story and pasted it on a piece of copy paper. While he was marking it for the replate, the man came and stood beside the city desk.

"I'm Joe Merrill," he said.

Crosse raised his head. He had a smudge of carbon across his nose. "Oh?" he said courteously.

"I used to work here," the man said.

"Did you?" Crosse said. With his finger he was holding a place halfway down a story on page two.

"The desks are all different," the man said. "Everything has been changed. My desk used to be right over there."

Jim leaned back and tossed the corrected clipping to the news editor.

"How long ago were you here?" Crosse asked.

"Twenty-four years ago. I mean I left then. I'm Joe Merrill. *Merrill*," the man said.

"I'm afraid that was before our time," Crosse said.

The man swallowed, standing there beside the city desk. His suit must have cost a hundred and fifty dollars.

Jim said, "There's a fellow over there who might remember you. Henry Estey. He's been on the copy desk thirty-five years."

"Estey?" the man said. He looked confused. "There were so many copy-readers . . . Sure. I think I remember Henry," he said, but his eyes focussed with a sort of panic. "Of course I do. Where's Henry?"

Jim and Crosse got up, and took him over to the copy desk.

At the far end of the half-circle sat old Henry. He would always be there, because he and his wife would starve if they let him go.

"Henry," Crosse said, "here's a fellow who used to work here."

"—Joe Merrill," the man said eagerly, offering his hand. "How are you, Henry?"

The old copy-reader got up and shook hands.

"What was the name?" he said.

"Why, Henry—I'm Joe Merrill," the man said.

Henry peered.

"I don't quite seem to place you," he said.

"Look," the man said. "I . . ." With an abrupt gesture, almost of desperation, he got out a card case. It was of thin beautiful leather bound in gold at the corners. He fumbled out three cards and handed them around.

It was his business card : J. T. MERRILL, and the name of one of America's great steel corporations. In the lower left hand corner, in small engraving, it said : Executive Vice President.

Jim and Crosse looked at Merrill with startled silent respect. But Henry read the card very carefully, holding it close under his cracked green eyeshade. Then he looked at Merrill. His old eyes were bald with enmity, they were bitter with a sudden hate. He dropped the card to the floor, where his feet had worn thin places in the linoleum, and his hand was shaking.

"I don't know you," he said thinly. "I don't remember you."

On the way back to the city desk, Merrill said helplessly :

"But—my by-line will be in the back files. I'll tell you the years. Let's send down for the files."

He lurched once.



Crosse said, "Sit down and have a smoke, Mr. Merrill."

Merrill pulled up a chair and lit a pipe. He had some trouble with the match. In his fingers, it scorched the side of the bowl.

"I'm here for a sales conference," he said, earnestly explaining. "Had to go to a dinner at the Union Club and when I got back to the hotel I got to remembering old times. I don't know why."

"Sure," Jim said.

"I don't know. The damned hotel room, and I . . . used to be young in this town."

"You're alone here?" Crosse said worriedly. "I mean, Mrs. Merrill—"

"No. I came alone. I guess that's it," Merrill said. "I got to remembering when I—so I came back."

Jim knew that Merrill would remember this in the morning, and in his bed shudder away from the empty Sunday morning light coming in through the windows of his hotel suite.

"Where are you staying?" Crosse asked, with an enquiring eye on Jim. After all, if an old reporter needed a little taking care of . . . Jim lifted one shoulder and lit a cigarette.

"Berkeley," Merrill said absently. It was the richest hotel in town, so grand that it could be on a hill well away from the business district. "It wasn't here when I was here.—Say, what's ever happened to old Jack Burien?"

Jim and Crosse glanced at each other, and then they both shook their heads.

"How about Bob Traler? Morgan Thompson? Surely you've heard of Gil Ewing. You must have."

"I think he's dead," Crosse said.

"Oh . . . Tom Rafferty? Walter Earling? Jim Carson?"

For the first few names Jim and Crosse had shaken their heads, and now they just sat there looking at him, but not at each other. They thought of Henry, he might know these names; but they wouldn't mention him again.

"Oh, God!" Merrill said suddenly and thickly.

After a minute, Jim said, "Do you know Bill Sparling?"

"He was city editor then," Merrill said dully. "I worked for him."

"He's publisher now," Jim said.

"The hell he is," Merrill said, but you could tell that now he wouldn't make any effort to see him Monday.

He must have been even drunker, though, than they had realized, because staring unsteadily into the bowl of his pipe he said:

"I want to tell you something. The best checks I ever cashed were the fifty-dollar paychecks."

"We do a little better than that now," Jim said.

"That's good. I'm glad you do," Merrill said. "But for that money I went through the years of . . . ugliness and—and my youth. As you fellows are doing now. But I didn't know it was ugly, and I didn't know I was young."

He had gray hair, but a strange deep voice, the voice of a story-teller. He kept poking one finger into the bowl of his pipe, staring at it, and Jim and Crosse sat uncomfortably at the city desk.

"I remember the rainy nights," Merrill said. "And—and the men I worked with. But I guess they're gone now, they and my youth. And the checks read differently now. I couldn't live

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now on fifty dollars a week, but they were the best checks I ever cashed. For work, for work, and, if you like it, for being capable of getting interested over the damndest things. For being young."

Crosse with nervously raised eyebrows was looking at the clock, and Jim was fiddling around with his pencil.

Slowly, Merrill pushed his chair back, and slowly got to his feet. He didn't seem to be really seeing either of them.

"Can't one of you fellows come out and have a drink with me?" he said. "Come on."

"You go, Jim," Crosse said.

"You know damn well I have stomach trouble," Jim said. "I can't drink, Mr. Merrill."

"Well, you come then," Merrill said to Crosse.

"Sure. Go ahead," Jim said. "I'll finish up here."

Crosse was such a good guy. He hesitated and then got up, looking twice as worried.

"—Say!" Merrill clapped a hand on Crosse's shoulder. "Is Whitey's still the same old place?"

"Whitey's?" Crosse said.

"Well, it was a speakeasy then," Merrill said, "but . . ."

"I guess it's gone now," Crosse said, "but there's a place just down the street where we go, most of us."

"All right," Merrill said.

As they went out, Jim heard Merrill say: "I bet Whitey would have known me."

Monday afternoon Jim told Brunn about it, making it maybe a bit funnier than it was, especially the business about the

fifty-dollar paychecks; and Brunn sat looking at his fingernails, both hands of them, and said :

"Well, Jim, it sounds good. It must be a nice way to feel. The bastard. I remember him. In Denver."

He picked up his long shears, and delicately cleaned a thumbnail.

"If he's still in town, go up and see him," he said. "Give him a success story. But straightaway, routine; none of this crap."

"OK," Jim said.

But the business about the checks must have stuck, because while Jim was stalling around his desk, getting ready to go, Brunn got up and came over.

"Jesus, what a nerve," he said. "To pull that on a couple of my reporters. God damn it, when I go out at night to my little white house in the suburbs, that's bad enough without him with his palazzo in Pittsburgh making me feel so honest. Now there is the insolence of the rich to the poor. . . . But he was a good reporter, Jim."

"I know he was," Jim said.

## T W E N T Y - E I G H T

*That night Jim went home to his room at 10 o'clock because Anne was having dinner at the Gerdners'. "I've put it off as often and as long as I dare," she said. "Mary*

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already has her suspicions. I'm going to say how inconvenient it is that you have to work nights, it keeps us from having the ordinary sort of dates." But by this time there was more amusement than worry in her eyes when she said things like that.

Vollard's door was open wide, and a woman had him backed up against the bureau. It was the respectable woman who had been listening there in the corridor one night. She was talking in a low continuous voice. Vollard saw Jim; his eyes lighted up with gladness and hospitality, and pushing past the woman he hurried to the door.

"Jim!" he said. He reached for Jim's hand, and seizing it, pumped it up and down with astonishing cordiality. "I've been waiting for you. You're late."

Jim started to say "What?" but was stopped with his mouth open by a massive wink from Vollard. "Oh," Jim said. "Yeah. Yeah. I'm sorry. I got here as soon as I could."

The woman had turned away and was staring out the window. She had on a gray coat with a bit of fur around the collar, and the rise and fall of her shoulders showed that she was breathing quickly.

"Mrs. Steever, this is Mr. Kerry," Vollard said.

The woman whirled with a swiftness you wouldn't have expected, and faced them. Biting her lip, she nodded to Jim; but her eyes, on Vollard, were dark and sunken with misery.

"Mr. Kerry is one of my business associates," Vollard said. He offered around a package of cigarettes with a perfectly steady hand. Jim took one, but the woman shook her head. She had a quiet nice face, made nice by years of self-forgetful living. She probably once had been a pretty girl, the delicate tilted features

were there if you looked for them ; the sort of laughing swift girl that you never imagine growing heavier and old. But here she was—motherly.

"Sit down, Jim," Vollard said. With urbane hesitation he bent his head ever so slightly to Mrs. Steever. "Mr. Kerry and I have some business to talk over," he said.

"So have we, Otis."

"Oh . . . I thought you had finished." Indulgently Vollard raised his eyebrows.

"Not yet," she said. Jim noticed that the handkerchief she was holding between her gloved hands was torn from anguished pulling. Looking at it, he saw too that one of her gloves had had a hole at a fingertip which had been carefully mended. And then glancing up, he saw that she was looking at him with timid, defiant eyes.

"Mr. Kerry," she said, "would—would you wait downstairs for just a little while? I—"

"Sit right down where you are, Jim," Vollard said.

She moved her hands, and the handkerchief tore a little more. "You don't need a witness, Otis," she said. "I . . . I'm not going to try to make trouble for you. I guess I couldn't, anyway."

"Trouble?" Vollard said softly.

"No— No, Otis. Please," she said. "I only meant I wouldn't say anything, anything at all, to spoil your . . . arrangement with Elizabeth."

Vollard laughed silently. His open mouth was old and ugly, the upper lip drawn lopsided-triangular like an old man's. "You couldn't," he said.

"No. I know. Elizabeth is avoiding me," she said. She glanced at her handkerchief and put it into her coat pocket. "She was my best friend. She was my best friend for twenty years," she said without any inflection whatever.

Jim had a curious feeling that Vollard was never surprised at a scene like this but still would never be used to it. He had a notion that Vollard was shaken, and would always be when a woman had loved him enough—so foolishly—as to bring her wreckage to show to him. But he knew what to do about it, the only thing he would have left himself to do.

"You'd better stay out of my business affairs. . . . But this is getting us nowhere, Edna. You're overwrought," he said. "I'll get in touch with you tomorrow."

"No you won't. Or ever, again. I know. I . . . haven't any money, myself." With a sudden borrowing-back of lost pride, she said between her teeth, "And if you did call me I wouldn't see you—I wouldn't let you—" But the pride collapsed and she turned away to hide her face. After awhile she said with the most awful bitterness, "*Business* affairs—" The breath stuck in her throat. You could hear it: a dry click and then a harsh attempt for air. "And you met Elizabeth at my house."

"Edna. I won't have this," Vollard said. "Not here. Not here in my room."

"I want—I have to know—" she said with laboring mouth, "if you— It would be all right, it would truly, if you still—"

"Well, I don't want to," he said. "If that's what you mean."

At the sight of her face even Vollard must have felt sick, because he said almost gently, "It was a mistake. My God, Edna,

can't you let a mistake alone? We both made it. We're adult. We're both experienced. We knew that to begin with."

"Not this kind of experience," she said. "And you can't get away so easily by just saying it was a mistake."

"You mean you are demanding?" Vollard asked.

"I have a right to demand," she said in a scared voice.

The shorthand of other people's quarrels is usually pretty cryptic, referring to things you don't know about. But not this one. Jim wondered how much money Vollard had got from some other woman, named Elizabeth. So this poor thing, who had no money, only a better-off friend, could no longer be of use to him. Jim wondered what Elizabeth looked like. It wouldn't make any difference to Vollard.

Mrs. Steever said suddenly: "But there's one thing I can do. I can tell Elizabeth, and let her feel the way I feel now."

There was quite a little silence. And after a moment or two, Vollard was shaking his head temperately, indulgently.

"That I can do, and that I am going to do," Mrs. Steever said. Her voice sounded queerly loud and awfully . . . alone.

The silence came back. After awhile, little by little, it became ugly. Negligently, with a flick of Vollard's cigarette-ash, very ugly.

Mrs. Steever said: "Otis . . . Otis . . ." and reached toward him with blind hands.

Jim got up and started toward the door, but Vollard came after him with quick strides and stopped him with fingers like hooks on his shoulders. Jim looked at the woman. Everything, everything had gone out of her face.

Vollard didn't have to say anything else. Feeling her way



at first along the foot-rail of the bed and then when that ended standing straight and pitifully tall, she walked past them and went out.

"Well, let's have a drink," Vollard said.

"All right," Jim said.

He sat down again. He sat watching Vollard, who with the most moral care, bending down and squinting, was pouring two glasses to exactly the same level. From his own seamy life Jim had learned to know the makeshifts—the makeshifts and the rare proud exactitudes of the loose ones, the evil and frightened men and women.

Vollard brought Jim's glass and handed it to him with a distant, horny twinkle in his eyes. Charming, Jim thought,—except where his own interests were concerned. Then he would turn vicious. Nothing would ever interfere with his interests of the moment. But now he lifted his glass to Jim and smiled over the unwashed rim.

"Liking you, son," he said, and drank. Putting his glass down on the bureau, he added, "I might as well tell you now—you and Anne—that my financial arrangements have been made with considerable success. I'll be leaving in a few days."

"For New Mexico?" Jim said.

"No. Quebec. I have large interests there." Vollard, lifting his glass again, cracked a grin of devilry at Jim—the grin of a tough little boy who hadn't yet been thrown.

Drinking thoughtfully, Jim liked the guy. It occurred to him that the wicked and disgraced of this world are much more child-like, in the sense of being primitive and direct, than those of us who just go along doing the best we can from day to day.

Without smiling, Jim drank with this unsuccessful sinner. Who would often—usually—be broke but not a bit worried. Breezy and bawdy, he could always come home to his girl and her pipe organ. And now, to her husband, a friend of his.

## T W E N T Y - N I N E

*Thursday night Wooller turned around from* a city desk phone that had been ringing, and looked over the city room. Five or six reporters were sitting idly or poking away at obits and community club notices, but Jim's desk was the nearest. Wooller said:

"Jim, take police on 140."

As he reached for his phone, Jim automatically glanced at the clock. It was 9:13.

Some girl on the switchboard said: "Yeah," and he said, "Give me the call from 140 to 172." There were the usual two impatient clicks and he heard the police reporter's voice from the press room at police headquarters.

"OK, Ronnie, what you got?" he said. "'s Kerry."

"Got a killing here," Ronnie said. "An old dame, middle aged. The name is a Mrs. Edna Steever. Spelled with two e's and v as in very. Twelve eight six West Adams Avenue. One room apartment. . . . Wha'd you say, Jim?"

"I didn't say anything," Jim said. "What happened to her?"

"Well, she got banged on the knob," Ronnie said. "We haven't got much on it yet. The dicks have just gone out."

"Who found her?" Jim said.

"The manager, with a bundle of laundry that she found downstairs. The manager's name is a Mrs. Glenora S. Tyler, sixty-two, same address. She thought nobody was home so she took the laundry in. The dame is lying on the floor. Only been dead a little while. But none of the neighbors heard anything. This Steever is a widow, lived alone. The report came in from this manager. She phoned. That's all I've got."

"OK, Ronnie," Jim said.

Wooller had got up from the city desk and was walking up and down beside Jim's desk, two steps and a finger snap in each direction. He cleared his throat the minute Jim hung up.

"This is a mystery killing," Wooller said. "The woman hasn't got any class and it was probably a prowler, but we can blow it up. We've missed this run, but we can make the Second Home with a cleanup. Take O'Hara. I've got him waiting for you. I want you to call me just as soon as you get there."

"You bet," Jim said soothingly. He had had a chance to breathe and to think out the elements, as far as he knew them, and if he was going to find some way of using his newspaper craft in reverse to spare Anne, he was glad it was Wooller on the city desk. He got his hat and went on down the corridor. Hack O'Hara was waiting at the door of the photographers' coop, leaning against the wall with his camera hanging from one finger.

"Now what?" Hack said.

"Oh, a murder," Jim said.

"Yeah, Wooller said that. I mean, how much is it really?" Hack pushed the elevator button.

"It's pretty poopsie," Jim said.

"That's good." Hack's small face became peaceful. "I've got a date."

"I'll get you back," Jim said.

They went down in the elevator and walked along the street and around the corner to the storage garage where the photographers kept their cars. The garage was cold and cavernous with a few harsh lights. At the gasoline pumps a night-gaunted young man in a white duster said:

"Hack, that fuel pump in your crate. Only way I see is to put in a new one for you."

"What'll it cost?" Hack said.

"Well, I'll show you the list price. I got the book."

The two of them went into the glass box of an office, Hack saying, "Well, the way it is, it won't start uphill hardly." Across the back of the young man's thin bent shoulders the white duster was sewn with green script lettering: 8th St. Service. While he was waiting, Jim didn't think particularly, except about Anne. He thought of her face, serene, smiling a little, the way she sometimes watched him. But automatically with tired experience his mind rested vacantly on the edge of the hard effort ahead of him, whatever it was going to turn out to be. It was there, all right, like a hard greasy ball in his stomach.

Hack and the young man came out of the office. Hack said, "Well, I'll think about it. But the way it is, it won't start uphill."

"Well, you're going to have that trouble. Like I told you, it's defective. It is in all that model."

"Well, I'll let you know," Hack said.

"All right," the young man said.

Hack's car was on the third level, and the self-service elevator swayed and scraped, going up with noisy slowness. They hauled open the cold greasy steel door when it stopped and walked a long way among rows of shadowy cars and got into Hack's. On the way down the ramp, corner after corner with the wheel cramped over, Hack said:

"Jes', the goddam robbers. Who's this that's got killed?"

"Oh, just some old lady," Jim said. "Nobody pinched for it. The woman who found her is sixty-two."

"What the hell they sending me out for?" Hack said. "There's no pictures there."

"I know it," Jim said. "I'll get you back."

"Goddam it, I was developing," Hack said. The car went out past the gasoline pumps. "Wooller," Hack said, and laughed.

In the street, waiting for the traffic light, Hack asked, "Where we going?"

"Twelve eighty-six West Adams," Jim said.

"OK," Hack said.

As they went up the hill, the lights of the city began to stretch out into pattern, what you could see of them between the passing trees and houses. West Adams Avenue was fairly close in, above the city, and the apartment house where Hack stopped was an old-fashioned square brick flat, remodelled and cut up into small modern apartments. Mrs. Steever's apartment was on the second floor in back, at the end of a hall. You could tell by the uniformed cop leaning there.

Her door was standing open, and so were two others along

the hall, but two more were closed and blank except for their brass numbers. In a place like this the neighbors, who worked in downtown stores and big offices didn't gather around a door where somebody had died, as poor people did. They stood at their own doors in the hall, a young couple, a sagging middle-aged couple, and watched from there; or else they closed their doors with tight knowing mouths, having read newspapers and magazine stories all their lives, and stayed out of it, listening and whispering on the inner side of their doors. The cop was one that Jim didn't know, but he looked at Hack's camera and said, "All right, boys," and without unfolding his arms pointed with one thumb. Back of them the two couples at their doors were talking curtly in low tones now that they were past, and the girl gave a smothered laugh of nerves and said, "Shh-hh."

As he went in through the door with Hack following him, Jim saw the two dicks bent over a spindly writing desk. He was relieved; he couldn't have asked for a better pair. But they had all the little drawers of the desk opened and they had their hands full of papers and one of them had put on his spectacles. On the top of the desk they had already a pile of letters and receipted bills. Mrs. Steever was evidently a woman who saved things, and that was bad. Both dicks looked up. The Times wasn't there yet.

"Well, well. Old Scoop himself," the one with the glasses on said with mechanical jocularly. "H'ya, Hack."

"Hi, Al. Clarence," Jim said. "I see Al's got far enough through night school now so he can read a little. Those glasses are ceasing to be a bluff."

"Hush, Clarence, this is The Press," Al said. "Hide that clue."

"You find 'em and I'll hide 'em," Clarence said sourly. "I'll tell you something, Jim, if you'll use my name instead of Cy Sudermann's. This woman paid her bills." He permitted himself a pale, bone-like grin.

"Any letters from a man?" Jim said.

Al shook his head. "Not her. There wouldn't be."

In spite of himself, Jim took a long breath of relief. But he took it carefully, lighting a cigarette. So Vollard had taken time.

The roll-away bed had been pulled out of its closet, and the covers were turned down, neat and cornerwise, but nobody had been in it. Jim thought he could figure that one out, but he could be wrong.

Mrs. Steever was lying on the Oriental rug on the other side of the room. She was lying in a tall, uncorsetted sprawl. She had on a soft gray silk dress with patterns of big white flowers.

"It wasn't love," Clarence said. "What are you going to make it now?"

Hack squeezed his small compact bulk past Jim and walked across the room. He bent over and looked at the woman's face and shook his head. Jim went over slowly and stood looking down.

Al came behind him, and stood breathing. Some papers in his hand rustled a little, nervously. There wasn't much blood, none in sight on the rug. One of her hands lay outstretched. The fingers were curled gently.

"What did she get hit with?" Jim asked.

Al said, "Nobody hit her. Somebody just pushed her on the chops and she went over backward and cracked the back of her head on this here." He patted the corner of a heavy chest. It was

department store Oriental, bound with flat dark brass. Lying on the corner where she had hit her head was a new novel in the paper jacket of a neighborhood lending library.

"Fracture?" Jim said.

"Yeah, multiple, but also," Al put his hand to the back of his neck, jerked his head sidewise, and made a loud-popping click with his tongue. "Doc Fairchild was here, and he said."

So somebody had pushed her and she had broken her frail gray neck.

It was a nice apartment. Quiet and nice. It was furnished from her former life. When she had a husband and they lived in a house together. You could tell what the house had been like by looking at the old, good furniture: a comfortable house in a nice part of town or maybe somewhere in the suburbs with a garden out back. Where in the springtime the windows would have been open on the flowers, with the curtains blowing in toward the heavy dark furniture. There was a picture in a silver frame on the chest, too, down at the other end. Obviously her husband. You could tell by looking at it that he had been a good, heavy husband to her. The apartment still had the smell of a nice woman living there—lavender sachet, maybe, and the faint smell of moth-balls, somehow pleasant from other days. Mrs. Edna Steever.

Jim went through the apartment fast and expertly, knowing the places people nearly always kept their pictures, but he found only two of her. Both were studio portraits, unframed but in their elegant cardboard folders. One didn't look like her at all. He took this and gave it to Hack. The other one did look like



her, enough so that Anne might possibly recognize it in a newspaper. This one he folded, jamming it together in a crease, and put it in his inside coat pocket. It stood up tall and uncomfortable there, bulging his coat up but he could keep it pushed back out of sight. He went to the phone on her desk and dialled the Tribune number.

"It isn't much," he told Wooller. "It's just about what you thought it was."

"How about art?" Wooller said.

"There's a good picture of the woman. Nothing else that we can figure out."

"Well, you'd better give what you've got to Crosse," Wooller said. "Aren't there *any* angles at all?"

"Not that I can see," Jim said.

He heard Wooller turn to Crosse, and after the two switchboard clicks, Crosse's voice. Jim gave him the story, playing it down. While he was talking, the Times crew came in. The Times desk hadn't thought too much of it, either, because the reporter they had sent was Walt Ashburn, a youngster. He stood listening to Jim, his hat pulled down over his eyes, acting tough, but his eyes flinched away from the woman's body.

Part way through giving Crosse notes, Jim suddenly realized how deep his own confusion must have been, how having a stake in this thing had thrown his routine off the track. "Wait a minute," he said, and covering the receiver with his hand he yelled at Al:

"Say, has she got any family?"

"Not from these letters," Al said. "No kids of her own,

anyway. Some dame here may be a niece, in Iowa City, and she mentions some other names. Usual family stuff. No sign of anybody living around here."

"How about her phone list?" Jim said, thinking of Elizabeth.

"Drug store, cleaner, stuff like that. If she had any friends she kept their numbers in her head. Jesus, what a life. She couldn't afford much." And Al held up her check-book, looked at it pityingly, and dropped it to the desk again.

"When'd her husband die?"

"Don't know yet."

"OK," Jim said, and went back to Crosse.

When he had finished, he jerked his head at Hack. Hack got up from the davenport and came over.

"Where's the manager?" Jim said.

"We sent her back downstairs," Clarence said. "You'll find her place in the back hall, downstairs. There's a sign."

Jim and Hack went on down. They didn't have to knock at the manager's door because it was open. There were a lot of neighbors in there—backyard neighbors, from up and down the alley—and in the middle of the room stood sternly poised, looking at them, a woman who was just carrying a couple of bottles of beer and glasses to friends lately arrived. One of the people sitting around was probably the corner grocer, and when he had come over he had brought the beer. She was a small, work-worn woman with the bowed, spry legs of one for whom life had been a long hurry. As Jim and Hack came in, a big blonde got up from a chair in a corner and came and put her arm around the old lady's waist, solicitously.

"Mrs. Tyler?" Jim said. "We're from the Tribune."

The tray with the bottles of beer and the glasses became absolutely rigid. Mrs. Tyler inclined her head formally, while a murmur ran around the room.

Jim said, "Would you tell us what—"

"Yes," Mrs. Tyler said in a clear, rehearsed voice. "I had been out to a motion picture theater, to the first show, and when I came in I saw her laundry on the table in the front entrance hall. I immediately took it upstairs and knocked upon her door. Receiving no answer, it crossed my mind that she was out. I then entered the apartment with my pass-key and saw her lying there. The rest is public property."

Another murmur, of approbation, followed her well-chosen words. The blonde held her tighter around the waist.

"And nobody in the apartments along that hall had noticed anything," Jim said. "I mean, loud talking, or screams—nobody had seen anyone come or go?"

"Nothing. No one," Mrs. Tyler said impressively. "In the excitement which followed I made it my business to ascertain that fact."

"Well," Jim said, "it's a pretty spooky business. Did you know Mrs. Steever well?"

"Mrs. Steever was a woman who kept to herself. I, too, am of that habit," Mrs. Tyler said. "I knew her as a pleasant tenant only."

"Did she have friends around the building?"

"She sent her laundry out." Mrs. Tyler allowed briefly a smile to touch her compressed lips. "Young man, the friendships and fusses in an apartment house these days begin at the laundry

trays." This got an appreciative murmur, and some good folksy chuckles. Mrs. Tyler was evidently known up and down the alley for her tart, homely philosophy. Grave again, she continued, "Mrs. Steever had only passing acquaintances with the other tenants, so far as my knowledge goes."

"Did she often have any callers?"

"I don't watch the tenants. I'm not in front very much," Mrs. Tyler said. "I've seen her go out sometimes with another woman, but I never heard her name."

Everybody was bending forward now. This questioning was getting tense, like in mystery stories and crime-comics. The big blonde looked down adoringly at Mrs. Tyler, and then at Jim. She had large blue eyes.

"What does this other woman look like?" Jim asked.

"Like her. I mean, the same sort of a type."

"Any men friends?" Jim made this one negligent, and a ripple ran through the crap-trained audience.

But Mrs. Tyler, on the spot, regretfully almost smiled again.

"People are always coming and going out of here," she said, leaving just a hope open. "I don't know. What would you think?"

On Mrs. Tyler's desk was the large framed picture of a gaunt and earnest man with some strands of hair precisely combed across the top of his bald skull. Probably the late Mr. Tyler, since he wasn't here, and a small yellow bowl of spring flowers had been set in front of the photograph. Looking at the picture, Jim said slowly:

"I'd say she didn't have any men friends. I'd say she lived

with the memory of her husband. She looks like that kind of a lovely person." He paused. It had gone well with the audience. There was many a downcast eye. They were in the presence of devotion and death. Those, too, were familiar to some of them—perhaps not from fiction. Carelessly, Jim said, "It would be a shame if anybody thought anything else."

Mrs. Tyler's hands, holding the tray, trembled a little. You couldn't see it, but the bottles of beer and the glasses were for a moment unsteady.

"Yes, she was a lovely person," she said.

In the hush that followed, Jim asked, "May I use your phone?"

"Certainly," Mrs. Tyler said.

He called through the city desk, stalled Wooller off with an air of guarded haste which Wooller would understand, and got Crosse again. He gave Crosse full quotes from Mrs. Tyler. When he came to the part about the husband's memory and lovely person, he looked at Mrs. Tyler inquiringly, to be sure it was exactly right. She bent her head gravely. She had said it, it was going in the paper, and she would believe it sternly for the rest of her life.

"Give me Wooller again," Jim said. ". . . Desk? Say, I'd better send Hack in with the pictures, hadn't I? I think I ought to stick around here for awhile. The dicks aren't through yet, and something might turn up."

"Well, all right," Wooller said. "We'll keep handling it as a straightaway mystery. But we need some more angles."

"That's right," Jim agreed, and hung up.

A little wearily, he walked back toward Mrs. Tyler. She was

still standing in the middle of the floor, she had not moved except to turn around and face him while he was telephoning. The big blonde had moved around with her, in awkward bumpings.

"Now, Mrs. Tyler, if you'll let Mr. O'Hara here take a picture," Jim said. It wouldn't be used, of course, but it would kind of nail things down with the old lady before the neighbors. Mrs. Tyler again inclined her head. "Mr. O'Hara," Jim said. "If you'll just step here, please. Mrs. Tyler—"

Hack unleaned from the doorway, and ambled toward them with his camera. Mrs. Tyler stood more sternly. A man got up and came hurriedly and took the tray with beer bottles out of her hands.

It was the blonde who made the fuss. "Oh, dear," she said, "my hair— I'm sure I didn't . . ." Her arm left Mrs. Tyler's waist and both her arms made big elbows while she fixed her hair. Little Hack looked up at her.

"OK, Sweet," he said. "That's good. Just a little back off the ear. Yeah, like that. Mmm-m," he said.

"Oh, Mr. O'Hara," she said, "—that is the name, is it not? —I just—"

"That's it," Hack said. She had got her arm around the old lady again. "Now just turn around this way," Hack said, "so I can get—"

He walked around them and Mrs. Tyler turned stiffly, to keep facing him, and the big blonde backed around with high-heeled tramlings.

"OK," Hack said. "Hold it. Now wet your lips."

They both did, and resumed their expressions. That is, Mrs. Tyler looked five times as stern. Just before the flashlight bulb

went off the blonde looked harrowed, haunted, but at the last second she flashed a wide, wide smile. She was a lovely person, too. Everybody was a lovely person. That made it just the way it should be all around.

"Do you want another one, Mr. O'Hara?" Jim asked.

"No," Hack said.

So Jim got the blonde's name—it turned out to be Mrs. Betty Lou Hornquist, twenty-nine, 1282-A West Adams Avenue—and he and Hack got out of there in wafts of good-will.

In the front hall, Jim said, "OK, Hack. You're clear. You might as well beat it on in now."

"Gimme the names," Hack said. ". . . I think that blonde's old man was there."

Bending over the hall table, Jim wrote the names on a piece of his copy paper, and Hack took it and left.

Jim was very tired. He waited a minute, thinking, and then he went back upstairs.

The police photographer was there, with his long spidery tripod set up over the body. Two of the coroner's young men had arrived and were sitting on the davenport, waiting. Their long wicker basket lying on the floor, pushed out of the way. A fingerprint man was there, too, crouched over and working minutely on the wooden arm of a chair. He glanced up scowling as Jim came in. Everything was the same as it always was in a place like this, the routine of work, but Jim stood there thinking about the horror for Anne's life. It would fade a little with time, but there would be this horror overhanging their life together, coloring and ruining their first years together. He asked the fingerprint man:

"Get anything, Rudy?"

"Everything's been wiped," Rudy said. "Every god damned thing. Even her face. This was a professional."

Al said, "It couldn't be. They just gave her a push."

"I don't care if they kissed her. This was a professional," Rudy said.

"They just gave her a shove," Al said, "like a quarrel. This was an intimate murder."

"Well, they sure figured it out," Rudy said. "Afterwards, anyway."

Jim picked up Mrs. Steever's phone and called a taxi. While he waited, the police photographer finished his business, carried his used flash-bulbs out to the garbage pail in the kitchen, and began packing up his plates and camera. The deputy coroners got up and put out their cigarettes. Jim turned to go but the Times man, Walt, lounged up to him and said jumpily:

"Got anything, Jim?"

Jim raised one shoulder. "Just what you see," he answered. "There's no class to it. Probably a prowler."

From the door, he looked back. She was tall, and it was hard to get her into the basket.



*He didn't have to wait long out in front* for the taxi. The driver saw the police-cars and morgue-wagon but Jim just said the name of his hotel and only grunted when the driver tried to talk on the way down the hill. So after awhile the driver shut up but kept watching him with big eyes in the joggling rear-view mirror.

At the hotel, Jim went straight upstairs and along the corridor to Vollard's room. He was a little surprised that the door was standing carelessly a half an inch ajar. He went into the room, and closed the door behind him.

"Well, they've found her," he said.

"Found who?" Vollard said genially. He was packing. A new suitcase was open at the foot of the bed, and it was already stacked about half full. The bureau drawers were open and his shaving things from the bathroom were lying on the bed, the damp shaving-brush wrapped in toilet paper.

"You're lucky," Jim said. "Today was the day her laundry came back. It was lying on the hall table downstairs all that time, and the manager came in and saw it and brought it upstairs and found her. I don't believe you'd been gone twenty minutes."

"Laundry? What the hell are you talking about?" Vollard said. But his eyes had barely flickered.

"Didn't you know she was dead?" Jim said. "You must have known she was dead because you wiped everything. You even wiped her face." Jim paused. He could feel his pulse beating,

under the knot of his necktie. "Are you *sure* you wiped everything?"

Vollard's face was elderly-concerned and innocent. His mouth opened downdrawn, with teeth discolored by long easy living, to say something astonished and shocked. Instead, looking at Jim, he gave a nasty dismissing laugh.

But he went to the bureau where on top beside a bottle of whisky was a stack of new shirts fresh from a store, with the pins still in them. Lifting them by their corners, one by one, he counted methodically through them, and then he counted methodically through them again. He looked at Jim calmly. He was methodical about everything.

"You're drunk, boy," he said. "I hope for everybody's sake, you'll remember you're drunk." He, too, paused. "It will be better that way," he said easily. He carried the stack of shirts to the suitcase, and began laying them in exactly.

Jim took another breath. "So it wasn't three or four or five days before they found her. They found her tonight," he said.

Vollard's hands were still in the suitcase, under the shirts. Jim wondered if he would pull a gun. He probably had one, and it would be a stubby automatic. But at once he knew that he wouldn't see it. Vollard was going to smart his way through this.

He could watch Vollard thinking. Only two people. One who knew, and that was Jim. One who might guess: Elizabeth. And both would keep their mouths anxiously shut. He straightened up from his suitcase, and the wrinkles around his eyes deepened to suggest a smile. And again the name of Anne was hanging in the air between them, unspoken. Vollard knew it didn't have to be spoken.

"Now. What's this brainstorm of yours, son?" he said.

But Jim was watching something else, something more terrible and pitiable, than Vollard's thinking. He was watching the bewildered awfulness in a man who had murdered. It was the key, you saw it in so many of them under the lying, the innocence, the bravado, the sullenness—bewilderment, a shocked and unbelieving bewilderment. His self, a stranger long denied, had caught up with him. It had pushed him, at last, over the edge.

Wearily, a little sick, Jim said, "We haven't got much time to talk. I haven't got much to say, and I'm going to say it fast. I'm on this story."

"Story?" Vollard said.

Jim moved one hand impatiently. Vollard looked at it, and then slowly up again at Jim's face. Jim said :

"It's a break, but only a little one, and I'd have known anyway, of course. You've already thought of that, and I guess kicked yourself. I know you'd never have done it. You're smart, and you remembered the other night, here in this room. Call it an accident. Keep on being smart. You know you're safe with me. And I hope with Elizabeth. Whoever she is."

Slowly, from being completely expressionless, Vollard gave Jim a pitying smile, shook his head, and cast his eyes upward. A little, only a little, too much.

"That's right," Jim said. "I don't want you to admit anything. That's the one thing I don't want you to do. It's bad enough for me now. So let's get down to business. There are a lot of other people working on this story. I'm going to keep on it tomorrow. I know the dicks and I'm going to do all I can. I can give you a day."

Jim hesitated, and then went on, "Unless somebody stumbles onto something. There's that chance, and I don't know how dumb your women have been."

Without moving his lips Vollard said, "You're sure you'll be working tomorrow?"

"Yes."

"But it's your day off." Vollard remembered every detail.

"This is a murder with some mystery in it," Jim said. "Poopsie, to everybody but you,"—at that Vollard's lips winced involuntarily—"but still, some mystery," Jim said. "Brunn will call me first thing in the morning. I'll answer."

"Who's Brunn?"

"He's city editor."

"Is he a friend of yours?"

"He won't know anything about it, if that's what you mean," Jim said.

"Well."

"Friday or no Friday, I don't dare stay away from this story, from where I can watch it," Jim said.

Lifting one shoulder in a lawyer-like shrug, Vollard turned back to his packing. He knew that Jim could protect him only to a certain—and very chancey—point. Jim could only give him a little time.

And now it was curious, almost the most curious thing yet: from Vollard's old back, bent over his suitcase, Jim got a sense, powerful as another presence in the room, of humiliation—Vollard's bitter and overweening humiliation.

"Well, son," he said in an indistinct voice, "I guess I told you I was going away."

"Yes," Jim said.

"But I've—I've changed my mind about Quebec. I'll write you, write you both from South Africa. Give you my address when I have one. There."

"I don't care where you go," Jim said. "But stay away."

"What do you mean? I don't understand."

Jim said, "After this blows over—even years from now, don't come back. If you do—if you ever do—I'll spill. In the right place. You understand that, don't you?"

Unexpectedly, of all the things Jim might have expected him to say, Vollard rumbled:

"Yes, I guess I do, son. But—"

"I'll make it simple," Jim said, "because I guess you're too smart to have ever thought about it. Anne has lived for years in dread of your visits, and in terror of what you would do. Well, you've done it now. I'm going to see to it that she doesn't have anything to dread from here on . . . *If you get clear of this.*"

Softly, Vollard said, "You mean you're taking my daughter away from me, son?"

"If you want to put it that way. Yes."

"Why, son, you can't do a thing like that."

"I'm doing it," Jim said.

They stood looking straight into each other's eyes. Almost shyly, word by word, Vollard said, "So you'll take my little girl away from me?"

"Well?"

Vollard sighed.

"Yes, son, I guess you can," he said. ". . . I guess you can."

There was quite a silence. After awhile, second by second, it became ugly. Negligently, with a twitch of one of Vollard's eyebrows, it became very ugly.

Jim thought hurriedly for any way the old boy could hurt Anne. There wasn't any.

Angrily and abruptly, he turned away. With his hand on the door-knob he said: "Keep on being smart."

"All right, son," Vollard said.

"Well . . . so long," Jim said.

The last he saw was a curt nod.

But on his way back to the office in a taxi Jim kept hearing old Vollard's voice saying slowly:

"So you'll take my little girl away from me?"

It made him feel sorry.

## THIRTY-ONE

*Julie had not been waiting long on the bench when she saw an old man coming toward her.*

She looked at the ground, waiting for him to go by, but he didn't go by. His shadow fell across the grass. She saw his feet stop in front of her.

Uncertainly, she looked up, a little at a time, as far as his hands. He was a well-dressed old man. His trousers were tailor-creased and a silver cuff-link gleamed under the edge of his coat

cuff. But his hands hung oddly loose from his sleeves. Then one of them closed convulsively, as if with nervousness.

"Is this Miss Julia Kerry?" he said.

To her he looked like someone who lived only at night. The sunshine was not friendly to his face. "Did Jim send you?" she said.

His eyes looked tired, overcast with . . . with obscurities, and opaque with a deep sickness. Maybe a grownup would not have noticed it. Maybe only a child, used to looking into the eyes of other children, would have seen that opacity. "Jim," he said, "can't get here today. He's working."

He seemed embarrassed, this old man. He stood looking out across the valley and the city. So she tried to be pleasant to him. But it was hard. He wouldn't look at her when she smiled.

And perhaps it was just as well. It was not a very good smile. It was irregular at the edges.

"My name's Vollard," he said.

After he had lit a cigarette, he said, "Anne—she tells me you've met each other."

He glanced at her, and his eyes lingered, and softened. But after a moment he said harshly :

"Would you like some chewing-gum?"

He reached into his coat pocket and then held out a fresh package of gum.

"Oh, thank you," she said.

She sat sliding it back and forth in her fingers. "Won't you have some?" she said.

"Well, no," he said. "I'm . . . I'm smoking just now."

He looked at the ash on his cigarette and then again out

across the valley. There was one place where in the sunshine a loop of the river looked like yellow oil. "May I sit down?" he said.

Her dry throat made a sort of click, so she just nodded with earnest politeness.

He sat down on the end of the bench, away from her. "I'm her father, you know," he said. "Like Jim is your father."

"Yes," she said. But she could tell that he had never had very much to do with children, with any child. People who were friends with children didn't have to explain explanations, in loud, simple-minded voices. So one had to talk to him with especial courtesy. "She must (click) . . . have been a lovely little girl," she said.

"Well, yes. I suppose so," old Mr. Vollard said, peering at her curiously. He cleared his throat, but only blinked.

All the trees were in full leaf now. She said casually, "How is Jim these days?"

"Oh, he's fine. So far as I know. I don't see much of him," Mr. Vollard said. He blinked uneasily again, and hitched even a little farther away from her on the bench. In an offhand voice he said: "He and the girl are so busy. They haven't much time for anybody else."

"I . . . know," Julie said.

"Lot of nonsense and excitement, this business of getting ready to be married. You and I are smarter, hey?" Mr. Vollard said. "There are advantages in our ages."

For what seemed a long time, a long time, Julie sat utterly motionless.



She wished Jim had been the one to tell her. She thought he might have told her first.

*Jim* was going to marry again. Jim—Jim too. She knew what it was like when people got married again.

After awhile she thought maybe this old man, watching her narrowly, could see that Jim had not told her ; that this was the first she had heard. She felt stiffening upon her face the expression of careless pride with which, when woefully beset by ignorance, she hoped the teacher would pass her over and ask somebody else. But it was hard to maintain, because the next thing the old man said shook her badly :

“Jim thinks a lot of you. He practically said so when he told me about meeting you here these Friday afternoons. He said he’s kind of got used to taking the trouble, usually he makes a kind of point of taking the time for it, but today he couldn’t make it. So I came to tell you.”

She sat frozen on their bench. With her half of the loyalty they had had, she wondered : In Jim’s voice, would it have sounded just that way? And, of course, talking to another man he might have—have been making a sort of joke of it . . . But the words were there. This old man’s mouth, opening in a crooked square, had imitated Jim’s hesitant, amused voice—an imitation hoarse with sudden inexplicable hatred.

For a moment she was bewildered not for herself but for Jim. She could not comprehend anyone hating Jim, except Mr. Gilson. And maybe—only maybe—her mother. She was so used to that, it was so much a fixed refraction of her limited landscape of reality, that she did not need to understand it and did not even

realize its distortion. And anyway the loves and hates of grown people, shadowy, exigent, and huge, loomed on bases unknown to a child.

Undone by an embarrassment which she could not have defined, she did not try to look at Mr. Vollard. With anxiety of breath she waited for what he would tell her next.

He only asked: "But you'd like to be with him all the time?"

"Oh, *yes*," she said.

"Even when he's married?"

Her hands tightened in her lap. She said very low, "If they should want me."

He pursed his lips and raising his eyebrows looked off into the distance. It was a silence so disturbing that she glanced at him timidly. He pulled his eyebrows down, creased and fierce, to an abrupt frown, and said, "They haven't mentioned it to you?"

". . . no."

"Ah," he said and waved one hand wearily, relaxing, as if something had been won, as if something had been proved with effort.

Confused, she tried to think what. Maybe she had said something wrong—something disloyal to Jim.

"Of course," he said meditatively, "they'll be having children of their own."

Looking at the old man's eyes, flat and cold, dimly she may have known that this was her introduction to evil. In the chill selfishness of Mr. Gilson she had had only a remote sense of malevolence. But this—

With a child's clearly-recording nerves she may have sensed intuitively that most implacable purpose of all: just his nature coming out. She closed her eyes before the intolerable pale intensity of abstract evil.

"Yes, Jim will have his hands full," he said. "New interests, new interests, even more than now."

He lit another cigarette, veiling his eyes with sad gray lids. "And his new wife, too," he said. "Oh, she would be kind enough. My daughter. I know her. I expect she'd even be kinder than Jim. Because she would be thinking about it. But wait until she and Jim have a little girl of their own, and you'll see what I mean.

"I guess about the best you and I can expect," he said with companionable cheerfulness, "is an absent-minded word once in awhile. Personally, I'm leaving. *I* won't be in their way."

She knew so little, and a child has to trust grownups—else there is nothing, nothing left. She sat quietly, her eyes half-closed against pain. Once she tried to swallow. She felt her head drooping little by little, drooping lower and lower. When she felt her chin upon her thin breast-bone she lifted her head quickly but she couldn't open her eyes. Not quite. They wouldn't open very wide. Somehow she thought of Mr. Gilson too. Between the self-thinkings of two men of shrewdness she was lost indeed. And Jim gone; Jim not there any more. Perhaps her conscious realization went no farther. It takes a duller eye to look at evil, and a more selfishly experienced one to see selfishness.

Only once, as she forced herself to look at him again, she had an obscure half-glimpse of whipped triumph: an ugly victory

of the bad, the weak, and self-betrayed. In her own darkness she suddenly felt pity for him without knowing why ; she could have touched his hand and said she was sorry.

"Well," he said, "I don't know. But Jim's obligations are different now. My daughter's, too. They're thinking of *their* life now. You're too young to know," he said, "but time makes changes."

She was not too young. She did know it now. Sitting on their bench, where Jim had told her stories, she saw the grass full green, and saw the story-haunted shadows of the trees. And dimly she may have perceived that it is not the city, or anything else that man has done, but Time itself that is the dusty god-mother ; and that her gifts are equivocal.

She said politely that she must be going now. Standing on the grass, scuffing one foot with that same unnamed embarrassment, she saw his feet shuffling uneasily too.

"Well," he muttered, "I just came out to tell you that Jim wouldn't be here. I'm . . . I . . . oh, well."

"Thank you," she said.

From the edge of the park she looked back. The old man was still sitting there.

As she crossed the crowded avenue there was still sunshine. The shadows of the high buildings blocked in smoky blue the hazy glittering distances of the avenue. Trudging among the hurrying people, she passed the corner where Jim always left her. She knew what she had to do.

*By Wednesday the story had dropped out* of the papers. Pretty soon nobody would remember it but Jim, and in a way the two dicks, and Eddie who behind his little-boy face never forgot anything that happened in the city. A year from now or five years from now, Eddie would remember the names and if anything broke he would turn his spectacles upon Jim and beckon.

And Mrs. Edna Steever had dropped out of the daily hurry of the living as vaguely as her story had dropped out of the papers. In life she had never been much of a part of anything, at least not for a long time, and pretty soon nobody would remember her except a few strangers, and to them she would be a shadowy figure, middle-aged and featureless. She would become featureless, too, to Elizabeth, whoever she was, and maybe a niece in Iowa City, and to Jim. Only one person was left in the world to remember her perhaps as a woman, her timid passion, her last and fierce feelings—an old man sitting in a bar somewhere in the world, and he would block her out of his mind.

By Wednesday Anne had nearly stopped wondering why her father had left so suddenly, without a word. She had so many things to think about now. This Wednesday night, sitting at her dressing-table, brushing her hair, she only said :

“Well, I suppose we’ll hear from him some day.”

Standing at the window, looking down into the windy night street, Jim took a deep drag on his cigarette.

"He said so."

They might. Some day. Vollard had checked out of the hotel Thursday night by the time Jim had got back at one o'clock in the morning. He was in some other city now. There, Jim supposed, he would lose himself—it was easy, if you knew how—and then go on under some other name, for awhile.

"South Africa," Anne said. "My goodness.—Jim, do you *really* like my new suit?"

"I sure do," Jim said.

"That's good," she said. "It's important for you to like the suit I'm going to be married in. I haven't found a hat yet. I'm going to try again tomorrow in my lunch hour. I think I'll try Kaufman's this time."

"That's a good idea," Jim said.

"I'm glad Father's gone," she said.

He would never come back. And he would probably never be caught, for anything. He knew too well the back roads taken by men.

"I think a white hat," she said. "With a dark blue lining."

"That sounds fine," Jim said.

"I know just what I want. If I have to, though, I'll take a dark blue hat with a white trim," she said.

But he was thinking of the city, and time, and death. Under a dull and uneven roar, under a gritty wind, a gritty wind blowing through the streets, a million hands reached in fretting hurry for the next thing in life. But half an hour ago, and now, and twenty minutes from now, a hand would reach no more. Jim thought of something he had told Julie one time. He couldn't remember just when. A story, a phrase he remembered: dusty

godmother. Death, he thought; dusty because she is covered with the sins of men, and with their grief. She comes, and whether her face is hideous or merciful nobody knows. She leaves in the motionless hand the gift of silence, and of being forgotten.

"And I'm going to wear a white blouse with lots of lace on it," Anne said.

"Good," Jim said.

### THIRTY-THREE

*This last Friday afternoon Julie was waiting for him, standing.*

She had never been so tired in her life. For a minute or two, while she was waiting, she leaned against a tree, feeling the strength of the tree against her shoulder. It was her first experience of weariness, the deep human weariness of the burdened, the sleepless, the dry-eyed.

He was only a little late, and when he got out of the taxi he said: "—I'm sorry I couldn't get here last week. I had a story, I had to work."

She hardly heard him, through the desperate determination to do what she had to do.

"I knew you'd understand," he said, "and not wait too long for me."

She said quietly, "Jim, I guess I won't be seeing you any more for awhile. I'm going to be sent away to school. In . . . in New England."

"*What?*" he said. "I won't—"

"Yes, Jim," she said. "That's the way it is."

"Look here!" he said. "I—"

"I guess we can't do much about it," she said. "Not with what the court said. And all. You know, custody and . . ."

"By God, I can do something about it," Jim said, jarringly. It was the voice he used not to her but to the world. "I'll get another lawyer. And we'll see about this."

It frightened her deeply. She thought in her soul that she would turn back into a baby if she didn't keep tight hold. This sounded like a grownup quarrel, and she had heard so many, and had been so helpless. And lawyers—she remembered with a sick and wondering heart the time of lawyers, and here it was Jim this time, her careless Jim, who was threatening that harshness and trouble upon them all. It made her feel how little she still was, though she was trying so hard to be capable; and how helpless still, though she was trying to help them all in the only way she saw according to the light that had been given her.

"Please. Please, Jim," she said with hard-won breath. "Don't you see? I—want to go."

"Julie. Julie!" he said. "Something's wrong. What is it? What is it, honey?"

"Nothing," she gasped. "Nothing, Jim. Honest."

"But our—our stories, here in the park," he said. "I—"

It nearly killed her, but with the trees and the sky darkening



before her eyes she said, "Oh, they're all right for little kids. But I'm growing up. Can't you see me—growing up?"

Jim looked very queer. She had never seen such a queer look on his face.

"Wait," he said. "Wait a minute. Let's go sit down on our bench and—"

"No, Jim," she said. She knew that if they sat down on that bench she would be done for. "I . . . I can't stay," she said. "I have . . . have to go, Jim."

He stared at her, closing his mouth slowly: and after a minute she couldn't bear to look at his face any more. But bowing her head, she knew it was better this way.

"So I just came to say so long," she said. "I'm so thrilled. Just think—" The trouble was, she was so tired. ". . . just think—a real boarding school! In New England! Of course, probably a summer camp at—at first. For the summer."

It was better this way. It was what she had to do. To send him away, releasing him. Jim wouldn't have to live in a grubby cheap hotel room any more, he wouldn't have to build a world of make-believe on Friday afternoons. He would marry Miss Vollard, who also believed, but was grown up: and would live with her all the time in the good ways, the solid ways of the real world.

"Aren't you going to tell me good-bye, Jim?" she said, not looking up.

She heard a strange sound above her, and felt his hands upon her shoulders, but she backed away, and the hands fumblingly dropped free.

"So, I'll be going now," she said. She put her hands in her pockets. The linings were torn, but she jammed her fists in. "Take care of yourself," she said, the way newspaper people talked. "So long, Jim."

And walking away with her hands in her pockets, whistling, she had done what she had to do. She hoped the swagger looked convincing, she hoped the whistling sounded convincing, and heartless. She hoped that leaving him she looked thrilled, and heartless. It was better this way . . . Releasing him from the unreal, the shining world of magic, of beauty, of loneliness that they had made in their hearts, these afternoons in the little park.

But she was believing for herself: *I'll be back sometime, Jim. When things are different still again. When I've grown, and when things are different again.*

She walked out of the park, out of something she had loved, toward the living room where in a few minutes, now, she would tell her mother that she had been seeing Jim. So that she really would be sent away.

Walking, she crossed the boundary of a park, a boundary of time, of a human life—from the windless imaginary world of childhood into the confused and troubled world of grownups.

A world confused with sorrows she could conceal, and pain she could learn to bear: a world troubled by the nebulous, the searching obligations of the human spirit.

A world not understood. But humbly she walked into it.











# The Dusty Godmother

by

**MICHAEL FOSTER**

Michael Foster's **THE DUSTY GOD-MOTHER** is a novel of fine simplicity, worthy to stand beside his **AMERICAN DREAM** and **HOUSE ABOVE THE RIVER**.

It is a triangle story like no other in recent fiction. The points of the triangle are these: a newspaperman whose work and unhappy marriage have left him disillusioned and suspicious; his child, Julie, separated from her father by divorce and forced to meet him surreptitiously in a city park; Anne, to whom he brought a first love, rather late.

*(continued on back flap)*





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